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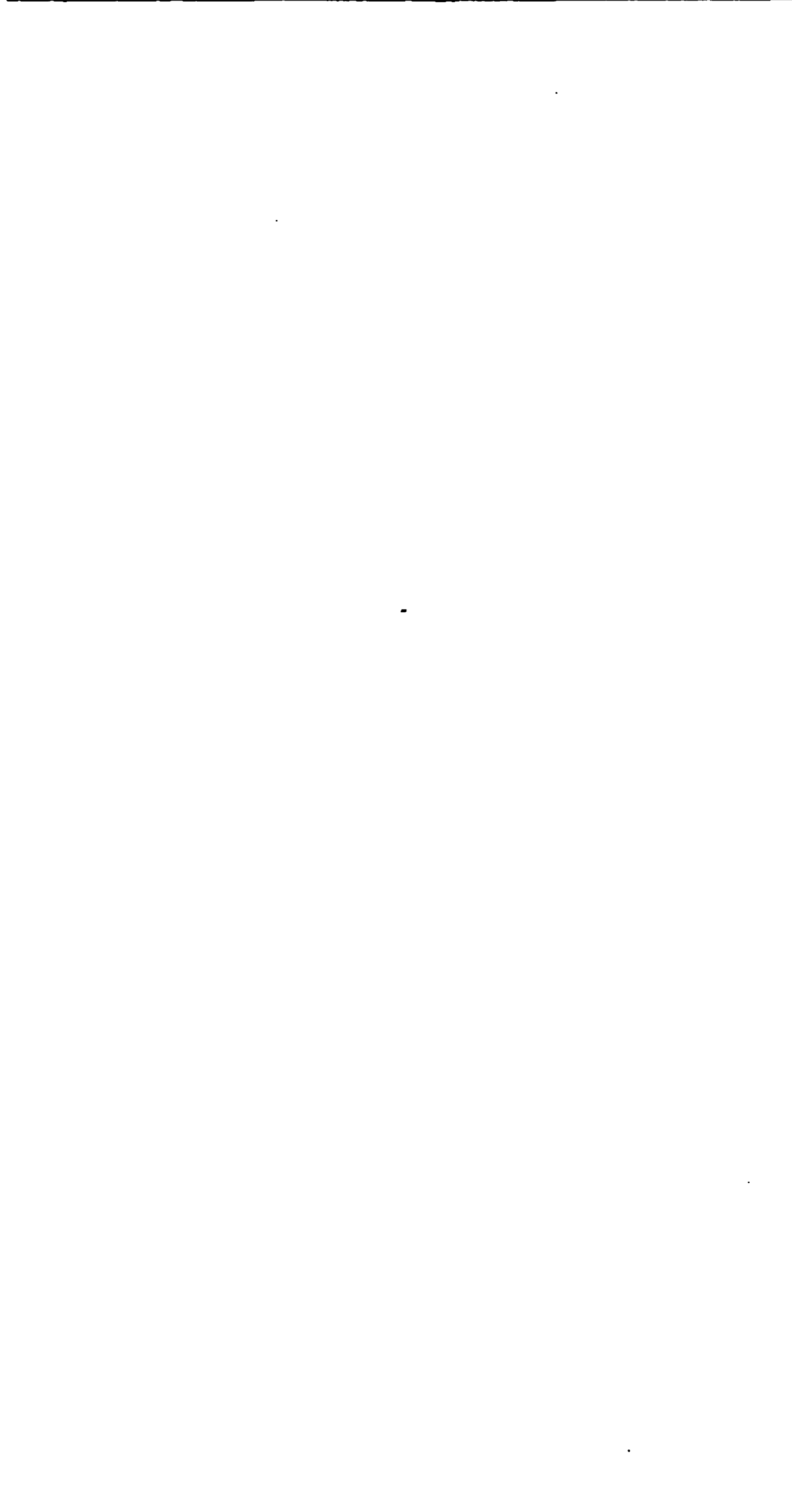
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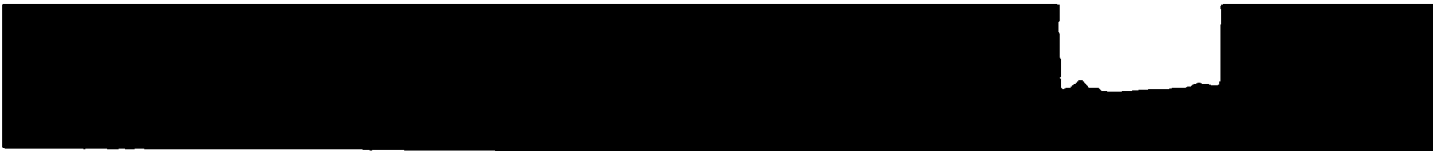
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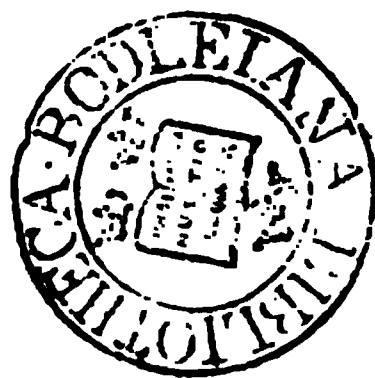




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THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

BY
MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF
"THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," ETC.

At sixteen, she came out ; presented, vaunted,
She put all coronets into commotion ;
At seventeen, too, the world was still enchanted
With the new Venus of their brilliant ocean ;
At eighteen, though below her feet still panted
A hecatomb of suitors with devotion,
She had consented to create again
That Adam called " the happiest of men."
BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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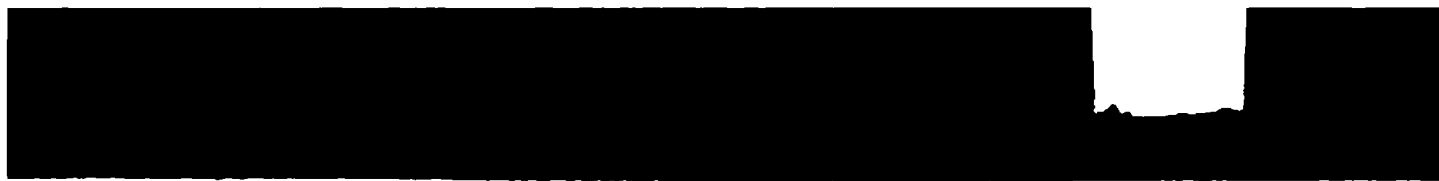
MRS. NEWMAN TWEEDY,

THESE VOLUMES

ARE VERY AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED

BY HER ATTACHED FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.



P R E F A C E.

The only explanation required by the following pages is, perhaps, a brief account of the manner in which they came into my possession. Driven, for change of air, into a distant county, after a long and severe illness, I accepted the hospitality of a friend living in one of those beautiful villages which are to be found in no other country than our own. The castellated cottage of my hostess, half-smothered in creeping roses, white jasmine, and passion-flowers, stood midway upon a gentle slope which formed the southward boundary of the village green ; the gray old church, overtopped by three venerable yews, and surrounded by its humble gravestones, joined the shrubberies on the east ;

snug cottages, with each its fenced-in garden, and its group of fruit-trees, were scattered along the base of a low range of hills, clothed with beeches ; and, at an easy walk from the hamlet, rose a stately mansion, within an extensive park, stocked with deer, and rich in timber. This noble property was inhabited by a widow lady, whose extraordinary matron-beauty startled me when I saw her, for the first time, at the village church ; and induced inquiries on my part, to which the replies only served to increase my curiosity. I was told that she was immensely rich, profusely and unweariedly charitable, but that a dark shadow hung over her former life, by which, even now, her mood and manner were occasionally influenced.

Her circle was limited, for she would not tolerate mere acquaintance ; and some of the families of the neighbourhood shrank from decided friendship with an individual who might compromise them, although her hair had become gray, and that her lofty figure was somewhat bowed beneath the pressure of time.

From her own hand I received this written record of the past, only a week or two before her

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death ; and I give it (with her permission) to the world, in all confidence that such a transcript of the *real* struggles of a woman's mind, and of the *actual* trials of a woman's life, will present more lasting and wholesome interest than the romantic creations of fiction, or the poetical miseries of a merely fertile fancy.

March, 1846.



THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

I do not know why I am about to write my own memoirs. It is said that a blind man should not judge of colours, but I am by no means inclined to submit to the truth of the sentiment. Why should not a *ci-devant* beauty, reduced to a *tour de tête* and metallic teeth, be able to lay bare the intricate recesses of a pretty woman's heart, because that woman may chance to have been herself? Perhaps it is merely to prove the invalidity of the proverb that I have conceived the project of recording my own confessions; and it is very possible that I may, in this, be about as wise as the boy who thrust his hand into a wasp's nest, to secure the honey before any one else could appropriate the prize; but I have at least the consolation

of feeling that I can only be canvassed and condemned in effigy, for I have far too much respect for the tranquillity of my old age to appear on the title-page of a book ; and the success of my afternoon nap, or my evening rubber, will consequently run no risk of being perilled by the comments and criticism of the public ; or the guesses and gossipry of my own immediate circle, who will at once find a reply to their suspicions when they look me in the face.

Heroes, monarchs, and statesmen (I place the heroes in advance advisedly) have bards and historians to sing and say all their great deeds ; therefore it is truly an excess of self-immolation when they meddle with the work, and rub in the shadows of the picture as a pastime ; and an equal folly when they take pen in hand, for the purpose of broadening the lights. In the first case, all the world laugh at them as fools, for having betrayed their own poor and petty weaknesses ; while in the second it is still worse, inasmuch as no one believes one syllable of the self-laudatory labour, which to all save the workman appears to be a mere web of egotism and fatuity. This, however, is far from being the case with that potent and influential portion of the creation entitled pretty women. Where lives the man who could undertake the biography of one of these ? He can talk of well-fought bat-

tles, intriguing cabinets, court gossip, or party measures ; but what knows he about flirtations, or palpitations, or heart-economy ? How can he undertake to raise one veil after another, each as mysterious as that of Vesta, so as to lay bare the myriad mysteries of a woman's spirit ?

Pooh ! pooh ! Man, all self-sufficient as he esteems himself, would deserve the fate of the detected schoolboy, did he even attempt so impossible a feat.

I can give another reason, also, for thus volunteering a record of the past in its relation to myself. The world has run wild of late years, upon biographies and auto-biographies. Every class of society has contributed its quota to satisfy the curiosity of "a discerning public ;" and each succeeding triplicate of volumes has been received with welcome. From the quaint sketching of dear old Pepys, and the sonorous periods of stately Clarendon, to the "dramatic twaddle" of Miss Burney, and the professional sallies and struggles of defunct players, nothing appears to have come amiss ; and this is just as it should be.

"The proper study of mankind is man ;"

and it acquires an additional zest when we have reason to apprehend (as must frequently be the case) that we were never intended to have the opportunity

of doing it at all. How many "sayings and doings," meant for the seclusion of home; how many opinions and sentiments, uttered only for the privacy of the family circle; how many letters, scratched off *a tutto volo da penna*, have been put to press, injurious to the memory of the dead, and painful to the feelings of the living!

For for own part, whenever I meet with an advertised announcement of the forthcoming "Biography" or "Memoirs" of some deceased celebrity, whether noble, political, literary, fashionable, or dramatic, I am invariably lost in astonishment at the reckless courage of the individual, who left such a task of delicacy and difficulty to be performed by others; when, at the expense of a little labour, he could have accomplished it himself, aducing his own motives, and assigning his own reasons, for a thousand actions which must inevitably suffer from misconstruction.

If then such false readings may, and must be, the result of the interference of a second person in the written lives of statesmen, poets, and players, what had *I* to expect, if I left my motives, reasons, actions, and impulses, to be decided upon by others? Truly, a pretty woman resolved (as I am) to be frank, and truthful, and honest, has more than sufficient cause to apprehend a host of evil judgments, not only from one sex, but from

both ; and can therefore ill afford to leave herself without that best of all advocacy—her own. An acknowledged beauty, like the turquoise-flowering flax, is marked, even from the first years of her blooming girlhood, for future appreciation : the germ is the index of the maturity ; but she must be well immersed in the stagnant waters of envy and maliciousness, and well beaten by the cudgels of jealousy and misconstruction, before she is deemed fitted for the uses of the world ; and the parallel holds good to the last ; for neither the beauty nor the flax is estimated at its real value, until all that charmed the eye has been destroyed, and that nothing is left but the good tough fibre which may render their available qualities serviceable to others.

Let no one imagine, however, that I deem it expedient to offer an apology for these my confessions. Far from it. I consider that I am doing the world a service by their transcription. My own sex may learn better to analyze their feelings and actions by the perusal, and the other to be less ready to misjudge both.

Of this I am well assured, that men, in the aggregate, can form no just or correct idea of the trials and struggles of a woman's life. It is an admitted conventionalism, that the world was made for man, and home for woman. Be it so, on the

broad basis upon which it should be understood. Let the stronger and the bolder portion of creation strive and wrestle with the ocean-waves of public life : they are the best fitted to its duties ; but let them not imagine that there can be no “ death from drowning ” in the more placid-seeming river. The violence of the cataract corrodes but slightly the face of the rock over which it pours its impetuous volume ; but the slow and monotonous dropping of the domestic drain wears a deep hollow in the surface of the stone upon which it falls.

Now and then we hear of a suicide in what is called “ genteel life ; ” and it is always *a man* who has had recourse to the razor or the pistol—the moral coward’s remedy for worldly disappointment. No woman, save among the more degraded of the sex (except, indeed, in very rare instances, where she commits self-destruction in conjunction with a lover or a husband, and cannot, consequently, be correctly esteemed a free agent, but rather as acting under a tangible and controlling influence), ever contemplates such a method of release from trial ; and thus the obituary of the year teems with cases of female consumption, and heart-complaint. Ay, truly ! ’tis no misnomer — heart-complaint !—where the thread is most worn, there it breaks ; and the “ weaker vessel ” carries her sorrows with her to the grave, and hides them there.

But the word *grave* has startled me ! I have no intention to moralize. My life contains its own moral. I will leave men to their self-satisfied view of the economy of human nature. It is, at best, a very harmless egotism : for they are no sooner in care or in necessity, than they, one and all, recant their error—at least, until they no longer require counsel or consolation ; and this fact may well make women smile at their delusion, and forgive it.

Thus much by way of preface.

My father was a wealthy merchant. Of a highly respectable but impoverished family, he had received for all portion an admirable commercial education, and a recommendatory letter to one of the first establishments in London.

Unlike such missives in general, which are commonly “bought off” by a family dinner, or “thrown off” with an apology, the document in question procured for him a high stool in the office of the Messieurs Osbaldiston, and a daily seat at their table, while his own good and useful qualities did the rest.

There was, I believe, some distant relationship between the principals and their young clerk, which doubtless cemented the connection ; but, be that as it may, thus much is certain, that my father had not been more than five years in their counting-house,

when he was intrusted with a mission of great importance to the West Indies ; of which he acquitted himself so skilfully, that the brothers, on his return, felt that they could offer to him no recompense more adequate than a share in their gigantic establishment. They were no longer young men : began to prefer port wine to burgundy, and a comfortable nap in an easy chair after dinner to a renewal of business ; and thus they found it pleasant and profitable to transfer the overplus of their occupation to their young, and active, and intelligent partner.

My father made three voyages to the islands before the death of the younger Mr. Osbaldiston ; and became an experienced man of business at an age when most merchants are merely in their noviciate. Advancing years, and the loss of his only brother and near relative, and moreover his junior, began to produce their effect upon the head of the firm ; who, ere long, abandoned all the interests of the house to my father, and contented himself with signing his name to transfer-deeds and bank-cheques, lounging away his mornings in the warehouses, and giving himself up to the care of his cook and valet for the remainder of the day.

Nor had the old gentleman ever reason to repent his confidence ; for when he was, in his turn, gathered to his fathers, he died calmly, in the comfortable conviction that all his dependents could

live respectably thereafter on their several legacies, without seeking a new and strange servitude ; and that my father was not only the proprietor of a magnificent business, but that his name was "good" for some £80,000 at his banker's.

Happy testator ! and still happier legatee ! My father was only two and thirty years of age when he was thus cast upon the world ; but, unlike many other young men, he did not relax an effort in the pleasant occupation of money-making. Let it not be supposed, however, that his perseverance arose from a sordid love of gold. Far from it. He had his projects. Riches were to be the means, and not the end, of his ambition. He admitted no partner into the house. He was sufficient to himself ; and he would not delay the accomplishment of his hope, by dividing and subdividing his receipts.

At the termination of a couple of years he ventured upon a gigantic speculation. Many of his friends shrugged their shoulders, and exclaimed upon his rashness, in an unctuous and tranquil tone, which satisfied their hearers that it would be no particular heart-break to themselves even if he should happen to have, as they expressed it, "kicked down all that he was worth ;" but, luckily, they were not put to the trial, for he was still the favourite of fortune ; and, after the suspense of a few months, he awoke one morning worth £500,000.

I think I have already shown that my father was a wise man ; nor did his mother-wit forsake him on this occasion. He was no gambler at heart, so he abandoned all speculation for the future ; and whilst his anxious friends were awaiting from day to day the intelligence that he had again tempted the smiles of his slippery patroness, they were startled and surprised, (in some cases it was even hinted not pleasantly) by learning that he had disposed of his house in the city for an enormous sum, and was on the point of starting for a tour on the continent.

Circumstances alter habits, says the Spaniard ; and it was certainly an apophthegm perfectly applicable to my father's case ; for he no sooner shook the dust of commerce from his feet, than he flung away with it all the habits of his past life. Not to play the purse-proud *fainéant*, however, did he do this. He had higher aims than that of lounging through existence. He knew that he had been a capital man of business. He was reminded of the fact by every hat that was lifted to him as he passed along the city streets ; his purpose was now to become an accomplished gentleman ; not a profound scholar, nor a scientific *virtuoso* ; he well knew that it was too late to indulge in such lofty dreams as those ; nor was he quite sure that erudite acquirements would at all further the plan and project upon which he had built up his own particular *Château*

en Espagne. His aim was simply to become a man of the world ; what, in the days of Addison and Steele, would have been called “ a pretty fellow ;” and what we, in our times, understand by “ a man about town ;” only shorn of his vices, and delivered from his duns.

Abroad he went then. Conveniently but not ostentatiously attended, he traversed France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy ; visited cathedrals, galleries, mountains, and waterfalls ; operas, grottoes, and Houses of Assembly ; learned to distinguish one popular singer from another, and to call the *premières danseuses* of the three great capitals by their correct names ; purchased a few undoubted (*copies of*) rare pictures, some fine Roman medals (manufactured and verdigreased at Milan), and several equally well authenticated busts and statues ; which were all carefully packed, and transmitted to an English warehouse, to await his return home ; after which he had nothing more to do than to amuse himself, and be careful not to suffer any opportunity of accomplishing his cherished purpose to escape him.

He was not, however, destined to succeed while on his tour. He had made many eligible acquaintance, but he was a shrewd man ; and he did not require to be told that the fashionables and hyper-fashionables with whom he had partaken of champagne dinners, and whom he had accommodated

with seats in his opera-box on an equal footing on the continent, might perchance look more coldly upon him in England, when they discovered that, in their own set, he was utterly unknown. Nevertheless, he did not despair. *Gross geld, grosser glaube*, and he knew it ; so he was content to bide his time.

Among the many pressing invitations which he received, to renew at home the friendship so pleasantly commenced abroad, was one so frequently and so earnestly repeated, that my father could not doubt its sincerity ; and he accordingly promised to accept it. That he was flattered by the pertinacity of the inviter there can be no doubt ; for he was not only a man of ripe age and matured judgment, but, moreover, a Scottish Peer.

That the Earl of Glenfillan was not wealthy was sufficiently evident from the facility with which he availed himself of the different domestic luxuries of his new friend : and the remarkable tardiness which he exhibited in making any return not purely verbal. This, however, was perfectly immaterial to my father, who required nothing at his hands ; and who was by far too proud a man to have suffered their positions to be reversed. And so Lord Glenfillan rode my father's horses, ate my father's dinners, travelled in my father's carriage, and borrowed my father's money to his heart's content ; whilst he received in return the I O Us of

his noble friend, and the reiterated invitations to which I have already alluded.

“ Did Mr. Tilden fish and shoot ? ”

My father at that time did neither, but he intended to do both ; so, as a matter of course, he replied in the affirmative. There was magnificent fishing and shooting at Glenfillan ! Four thousand acres of moorland, and a lake like an inland sea, visible from the windows of the castle. Mr. Tilden was an admirable billiard-player. His lordship was rejoiced at it, for they had the best table in Scotland at Glenfillan—rather out of repair, he was afraid, for his gout had obliged him to abandon the game, and the ladies of his family did not understand it ; but he would have it set to rights against he had the honour of receiving Mr. Tilden ; who perhaps would be able to induce “ Flora and Madelaine ” to make an attempt at learning.

Of course my father was delighted at the prospect of teaching two hoydening girls to play billiards on a rickety old table ; and he felt half tempted to offer the Earl a new one of his own selecting ; which, without doubt, he might have done safely, as Lord Glenfillan was not prone to take offence at such trifling matters ; but he forbore, for he was strongly imbued with a strange sort of delicacy, which always prompted him to make his wealth as little conspicuous as possible,

and never to presume upon it by taking liberties with others.

The close of their continental communion took place at Calais, whither my father had conveyed his lordly friend from Marseilles in his own carriage; and, as a matter of course, the Earl had been his guest throughout the journey. The arrangement was agreeable to both parties; for, as the courier who had accompanied my father from England transacted all business upon the road, so neither of the *milords* in the calèche and four which opened the travelling procession were broken in upon by dull details of the day's expenses. In short, they got on together admirably. The Earl shared my father's carriage; his solitary man servant was *de tiers* with my father's valet and his *chéf*; all the luggage jolted along amicably in the same *voiture d'occasion*, guarded by the sleepy grooms; and nothing could be more amicable or more pleasant than the whole arrangement.

Once or twice his lordship of Glenfillan exceeded a little at table upon the road; but that was the fault of my father's hospitality, and the hyper-zeal of his attendants; and the noble Earl had a gout-mixture in the carriage-pocket near his hand, which, diluted in a little pale brandy, generally succeeded in procuring him an hour's sleep; so that, upon the whole, he might have been worse off on the

rugged highways of *la belle France*; and he admitted the fact with a graceful frankness which could not but convince my father of the sincerity of his assertion.

By the bye, Lord Glenfillan, as I should have explained, had visited the French capital for the purpose of consulting a celebrated gout-doctor of that day; from whose skill he had been led to expect that he should obtain both speedy and permanent relief. But it is certain that if his counsellors had themselves really derived any benefit from the Gallic Galen in a similar extremity, they had been of a different order of men from the Earl, who backed up all the remedies of his medical adviser, with dinners served at *Les Frères Provençaux*, and Burgundy from Justin.

This state of things, or rather this system of curative ethics, could not, of course, last long, without convincing his most gustative lordship that he was rather becoming worse than better.

That it was *reculer pour mieux sauter*, he was not altogether clear; and in this dilemma, with very real and natural reluctance to tear himself from the flesh-pots of Egypt, and a still more invincible objection to be conveyed home in a leaden receptacle, six feet by two, he seized with avidity the hope held out to him of better success with an Italian empiric established at Marseilles; and forthwith departed for the fair city of the south.

Alas for the gout-tormented Earl ! To an individual of his tendencies, this was fairly a case of *cader dalla padella nella brace* ; for at Marseilles, in addition to the sublime *cuisine* of Paris, he found all the luxuries of the East ; all the fruits of the earth ; and all the fish of the sea. My Lord Glenfillan had such a fit of the gout at his hotel in the *Rue de Rome*, eight days after his arrival in the paradise of gastronomers, that he afforded a noble opportunity for the display of skill possessed by Il Signor Ferdinando della Placida—the very name of the man would have seemed to me to be either an insult or an epigram—and began to have serious thoughts of making his will.

It was at this period that my father returned from Malta ; and, having heard that he was under the same roof with a sick countryman, very inefficiently attended, and in the hands of an ignorant pretender, who was *de moitié* with the cook in winding up what had been an affair of many years' standing, in a very complete and concise manner ; he sent in his card to his noble neighbour, and begged permission to wait upon him.

The gouty lord desired no better, for he had already heard from his valet of the arrival of a *Milord*, the *fracas* of whose return to his old apartments had reached even to the sick chamber ; had received a detailed account of the nature and number of his attendants, equipages, horses, and packages ;

and was, moreover, tired of his own society, and glad of any incident which promised a momentary amusement.

No better prelude to rapid acquaintanceship could have been suggested by the most practised social tactician. Lord Glenfillan was drugging, gorging, and frightening himself into his grave, with all possible expedition; and there he sat with his foot swathed in flannels, a Glengarry cap upon his gray head, a tartan waistcoat covering his ample chest, and a flowered dressing-gown enveloping his tall and bony figure; with an English journal a fortnight old, (for in those days *Galignani* was not, and *L'Echo du Continent* lay hushed in chaos,) endeavouring to read, for the twentieth time, the speech of one of his political opponents, most provokingly broken up by "Hear! hear!" and "Cheers from all parts of the House."

I once heard it declared by a gallant officer, now in his grave, that the greatest misery of human life was to halt with a party of men in a country village, and to remain throughout the day in its solitary inn, with, for all companionship, an old Army List, in which your own particular regiment was torn out. I am tempted, however, to believe that I should have preferred even that dilemma to the Earl's. Be it as it may, he averred that this unlucky paper was his only resource between his

paroxysms of pain, which, as he was a rabid politician, it had probably assisted to multiply.

No wonder that my father soon ceased to be considered as a stranger, and that his daily advent in the sick room was hailed with delight by the querulous invalid. Ere long Lord Glenfillan had extorted a promise from his friend not to abandon him during his illness ; and soon afterwards it was agreed that they should make the homeward journey together ; and this was how it came to pass that the Earl and my father arrived at Calais in company.

CHAPTER II.

It has just struck me that I ought to give some idea of the personal appearance of my father. I remember him well, for I loved him very dearly ; and my memory supplies me with the picture of a tall, finely made, and aristocratic-looking man, with large gray eyes, a handsome but somewhat too prominent nose, hair which had once been almost black, magnificent teeth, and a smile so beautiful that at times I still see it in my dreams. His extreme nicety and neatness might have passed into a proverb ; but he was no whit a prig ; and he had so thoroughly divested himself of all the formalities and technicalities of his early pursuits, and fallen back so easily and so naturally upon the proud old blood which filled his veins, that I feel convinced, had he ever been raised to the peerage, no one could have considered him misplaced.

I have a miniature lying beside me now, however, which has preserved a far more flattering portrait of my father than even *my* loving memory. It was taken the year of his marriage, as a bridal-

gift to my mother ; and, judging from the ivory counterfeit, he must at that period have been supremely handsome.

Moreover, most courteous reader, he was *my* father !

After a few months spent in London, which were fully occupied by the arrangement of his monetary affairs, the purchase of an eligible residence, and daily practice at a shooting-gallery to fit him for his coming campaign in Scotland, my father began seriously to meditate a descent on Glenfillan. The Earl had, at times, been grandiloquent on the subject of his paternal estate ; and his visitor consequently left town with very magnificent ideas of the locality which he was about temporarily to inhabit.

There was no steam at this time, so that the journey was rather a long one ; but my father was glad of the opportunity of seeing Edinburgh, and would not allow himself to consider it tedious.

He spent a week in Auld Reekie, and then started for the Highlands. He saw all the "lions" (as per guide-book) before his departure ; but I am afraid that he was deficient in historical sentiment, if not in morals ; for he took no interest in Holyrood, simply because he had not made up his mind whether Mary were a martyr or a culprit, and rather inclined to the latter opinion. Now, if

my father carried one particular prejudice to excess, it was against coquetry and coquettes ; therefore it requires no explanation that the very idea of conjugal infidelity was to him hateful beyond the power of words.

He was the very aftertype of Cæsar.

This, *par parenthèse*.

When he advanced beyond Edinburgh, the scene changed. Glenfillan lay, like a lion's lair, in the very centre of the Highlands, and the roads were anything but Macadamized. All around him was wild and grand, but the air was hungry ; and as he had left all his establishment in town, save his body-servant and a couple of grooms, he fared, as he travelled, somewhat roughly. He had no taste for mountain-dew ; not a soul to speak to except his man, who began to wax slightly sulky, as he left, according to his own opinion, all civilization and comfort behind him ; and, altogether, his progress was as dreary as it was slow.

At length, however, they reached a hamlet with an unpronounceable name, where they found half a dozen of the Earl's retainers, who had already been waiting there several days with as many wild-looking, wiry, ungroomed mountain ponies, to serve as guides to the Castle, and to help the Sassenach gentleman over sundry "bad bits" which they had to traverse on their way. Only one among them

could make himself understood, and they were all as savage-looking as a party of bandits ; but nevertheless they were a relief to the monotony of his journey, and to the eye of an artist would have been in admirable "keeping" with the scene. They were, moreover, active, strong, and willing ; and proved eminently useful to the unaccustomed and helpless travellers.

From the crest of a mountain which it had taken them three dreary hours to ascend, and which my father had partly mounted on foot, his guide at length pointed out a small gray object which he exultingly announced as Glenfillan Castle. He was answered by a shudder. Nothing could be more desolate than the aspect of the "promised land" from the spot chosen to make it known.

The travellers were standing, as I have said, on the brow of a high mountain, covered entirely with heather, and utterly destitute of trees ; before them and beneath them, at the distance of several miles, lay a deep valley, backed by another rugged and cloud-capped height ; and in this hollow stood the Castle ; while, about a furlong off, commenced a bleak, cold, unsheltered sheet of water, which was lost in the distance as it wound round the base of the giant mountain that shut in the view.

There was an expression compounded of contempt and mortification on the countenance of the high-

lander, as he met the look of disappointment and disgust which my father could not repress ; but he gave no sign of annoyance beyond leaving his side, and talking in a quick and indignant tone to his companions.

The descent of the mountain proved to the full as tedious as its rise ; and thus, fortunately for himself, my father had both time and opportunity to amend his first judgment, and to give due admiration to the several really noble features of the scene. The sun, " that great landscape painter," threw in opportunely a few touches which greatly relieved the vastness of the picture ; and as the light vapours swept along the sky, casting their flying shadows upon the hills, and succeeding each other like pleasant thoughts in a weary mind, he began to see positive beauty where half an hour before all had seemed bleak and barren. As they advanced, too, the old gray castle loomed out majestically from the green heather, and grew into size and importance. My father could distinguish a round tower of respectable altitude, and a length of wall which might be a battlement, or a terrace, but which, in either case, gave a dignified and solid air to the whole edifice. Trees there were none, even about the building, at least none that he could discern on his approach ; but, nevertheless, he felt more reconciled than he had done on the mountain-

top, and became at last even interested in the aspect of his temporary home.

They had no sooner reached the outskirts of the glen than one of the guides, springing to the back of his pony, rode off at a pace of which my father had never believed the animal to be capable, in order to announce the arrival of the expected guest to his noble master ; and in about an hour the well-appointed English chariot passed the gate of Glenfillan Castle, and my father found its lordly owner waiting to receive him on the threshold of his own stately hall.

The day was far advanced ; and after a warm but brief welcome, the visitor was ushered to his dressing-room to refresh himself after his journey, and to prepare for dinner. The ladies were already busied with their toilettes ; and my father consequently retired without having been presented to any member of the family. He was conducted to his apartments by a fine-looking, gray-headed, solemn butler, who seemed almost coeval with the building, and who appeared to consider himself the greatest personage on earth, except his lord.

The dressing-bell was already ringing out sonorously from the belfry-tower, and the sound harmonized agreeably with my father's sensations. He was gratified by the reception of the Earl,

somewhat impressed by the ancient stateliness of all around him, and disposed to see everything *en beau*. His apartment was spacious and somewhat gloomy. The bed and window were alike hung with dark green damask; and the walls were of richly carved oak, into which were panelled a series of what were evidently family portraits, the size of life, all grim and ghastly with age. The bed itself was of that capacious description which would lead one to infer that one's forefathers and foremothers must have been of unconscionably broad dimensions; the window, deeply pierced into the massive wall, was of a totally different character, for it was narrow to an inconvenient degree; but, *en revanche*, it reached from the ceiling nearly to the floor, whilst its arch was filled with stained glass to the depth of half a dozen of the diamond-fashioned panes, which reduced the already small quantity of light admitted into the chamber to something still less. There was, moreover, an aspect of decay and rustiness about everything, which betrayed that the Taplow and Holland of the day had not laid their refined and renovating spell upon the place, but that it was mouldering away quietly and comfortably, without interference of any kind. Although it was yet early in the summer, the air of that mountain-valley was still keen enough to render the huge fire which was burning

upon the hearth the most attractive object in the room ; and, as my father's valet somewhat sulkily remarked, "it was a relief, in such a hobgoblin-looking place, that nobody could understand who hadn't seen it."

The gold-furnished dressing-case had scarcely given up all its costly contents for the decoration of the toilette-table, when the second bell rang, and my father prepared to obey its summons ; but a difficulty arose as to the means of reaching the dining-room without a guide ; there was no bell in the room ; while my father felt, *en preux chevalier*, that he would rather risk any inconvenience than detain the ladies from the dining-room, and create an unfavourable impression within the very hour of his arrival. He opened the door of his apartment abruptly ; rushed out into the gallery ; and nearly fell into the arms of the same solemn old gentleman who had marshalled him from the presence of the Earl, and who was patiently waiting to conduct him back.

And now I come to an eventful moment in my father's life, and one to which I owe my own existence. The double doors of a spacious drawing-room, comfortably draped with tapestry, were thrown back by two liveried attendants ; and as my father entered, the Earl abandoned his position upon the hearth-rug, where he had been com-

fortably facing the ladies, and backing to the fire, in that peculiarly graceful style which has been popular among the male sex in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from time immemorial; and advanced to meet him with a mixture of stately urbanity and hospitable frankness.

He was presented in turn to Miss Margery Macspleuchan, a tall, stiff, bony, high-cheeked, sharp-nosed spinster of some fifty, "or, by'r lady, threescore" years, attired in a very stout and rather rusty dress of black tabinet, with a point-lace apron and ruffles; the ostensible *dame châtelaine*, and sister-in-law of the Earl; to the Lady Flora Glenfillan, his lordship's elder daughter, a sepia fac-simile of her maiden aunt; and ultimately, to the Lady Madelaine "of that ilk," his youngest child, the offspring of a second marriage, and one of the loveliest maidens who ever furnished forth the day-dream of a poet.

The Lady Flora was all smiles and welcome; she spoke with a strong accent, and laughed until she displayed an awful vacuum, where teeth were not. She was, as I have said, a modified duplicate of her aunt, who had been the sister of her mother. She was not quite so stiff, nor so tall, nor so bony; her cheeks were not quite so prominent, and her nose was a little more moderate in its sharpness; all, or most of which circumstances,

were probably to be accounted for by the fact that she had not long passed her thirtieth year ; neither was her sable silk quite so rusty, nor her point quite so yellow ; but in all about her there was goodly promise that the likeness would increase from day to day.

Lord Glenfillan had, in his first matrimonial venture, made a prodigious *mésalliance*, having married the daughter of a petty laird, no one could ever rationally decide wherefore. But Jessie Macspleuchan was a shrewd body : she required no spectacles to detect the prominent weakness of the great man ; and she accordingly revered with so awful a reverence, and worshipped with so humble a worship, the dignity of his peerage, that the plain, homely, prim nobody soon grew to be the most sensible woman of the Earl's acquaintance. Her nose was no longer sharp ; her voice had ceased to be shrill ; her dull gray eyes were turned with so much meek wonder upon his coronet, that he felt assured, in his own mind, that even matrimony itself would never induce any undue familiarity or pretensions of equality on the part of Miss Macspleuchan.

So, to the astonishment of every one save the lady herself, she became, after due deliberation on the gentleman's side, Countess of Glenfillan ; and then she taught the proud peer a lesson which he

never afterwards unlearned. She had not “served seven years” for her coronet, crushing every natural impulse, and quelling every rebel disposition, to be “shelved” by her own husband, and made a nonentity in her own house. Contention, as the word is usually understood, could not occur between them, for Lord Glenfillan was too innately a gentleman so to degrade himself; added to which, he soon learnt to feel that he was no verbal match for his lady; but for years it was a war of wits, and a war of will, that most effectually prevented all stagnation in the establishment. At length, however, the Earl, whose armour began to chafe him from constant wear, and who had no wish to die in his harness, prudently laid down his arms, and My Lady Glenfillan had it all her own way.

This state of things lasted for six years, during which period she became the mother of a daughter—the Lady Flora, to whom my reader has been already introduced—and whom she only lived to see enter her second year.

The noble widower was not disconsolate; and, whether it were from respect for his departed wife that he was anxious to demonstrate his confidence in her family; or, on the contrary, that he desired to remove from before his eyes every thing which could remind him of the deceased lady, he never

expressly declared ; but it is certain that he forthwith proposed to his honoured father-in-law, the laird, that his daughter Margery should take charge of the infant until she became of an age to require more accomplished guidance. Miss Macspleuchan desired nothing better ; and declared herself quite ready to remove to the Castle, and to receive her dear little niece from the hands of her noble parent, “directly after the great wash ;” but this concession by no means formed part of the Earl’s arrangement.

He had been Macspleuchaned long enough, and their season was over. He did not wish his will and pleasure to be put into competition with soap and blue ; and he therefore gave Miss Margery civilly to understand that the conventionalities of life would not permit a man of his age to offer a home beneath his roof even to the sister of his wife. That the Lady Flora Glenfillan would be no burthen upon her mother’s family, he deemed it almost needless to add ; and he felt convinced that, when Miss Macspleuchan had taken time to reflect upon the subject, she would find that her obliging proposal was utterly out of the question.

Now, all this was not said, but written—written upon a very ample sheet of paper, and sealed with the Earl’s coat-of-arms ; to produce which effectively,

it required almost sealing-wax enough to fill a tea-saucer. This signet never failed to produce its effect. It was the *fee-faw-fum* which announced to refractory tenants that their rents *must* be paid; and to presuming petty lairds that his lordship the Earl understood nothing about liberty and equality. It may consequently be imagined that its apparition at the hill-farm rendered further discussion useless. In short, it performed a miracle, for it shut Miss Margery's mouth.

The Lady Flora was accordingly transferred from the Castle to the laird's house, and from the cold caresses of her noble father to the hearty hugs of her less exalted relations; and in due time initiated into all the mysteries of meal porridge, baked sheep's heads, and haggis.

A happy man was Lord Glenfillan; a very happy man! He felt vastly as Sinbad must have done, when he shook the old gentleman from his shoulders, whose organ of adhesiveness he had so long mentally voted a nuisance. Right glad was he, when his eye chanced to rest upon the hatchment which he had caused to droop, like a heavy eyelid, over the upper section of one of the drawing-room windows, as a last token of respect to the deceased—much on the same principle that a man who has completed an unpleasant letter appends an enormous flourish to his signature, in the exu-

berant joy of his heart that he has come to an end of it—right glad was he, I say, that her departed ladyship had not presented him with an heir to his family honours. A son of Miss Jessie Macspleuchan to inherit the name and rank of the Glenfillans—faugh ! And he was still, as he reflected, so young and active, that a season in London, and careful making-up, would repair all the ravages of carelessness and seclusion.

This idea haunted him for several years ; but no man, not even a Lord Glenfillan, can throw off, without a violent effort, the bonds which time and habit have woven about him. The *parvenue* Countess had reduced her husband's confidence in himself, and in his own value, full fifty per cent. : and although he still talked very big to himself, he shrank involuntarily from the effort of testing the opinions of others.

At length, however, he arrived at the conclusion that it behoved him to marry again with all convenient speed ; but he had become a wiser man than he was when “ caught ” by the Macspleuchan ; and consequently *now*, when he was many years older by the calendar of time, and twice as many by the gnawing of mortification and disappointment, he decided that two things were absolutely indispensable in the fortunate woman whom he should select as his second wife—extreme

personal beauty, and an undeniable pedigree. A few thousands into the bargain would not, he felt, be amiss ; but, in favour of the two former attributes, he resolved not to make a point of the last.

He had remained throughout all these years at Glenfillan, visiting his orphan child scrupulously once in each month, and shuddering as he remarked how much the Macspleuchan nose and bone were beginning to develop themselves ; but eventually he put his purpose into execution, and started for England. He had not reckoned without his host. A clever *artiste* succeeded in making him up admirably ; and, being really a fine man, and moreover a peer, he was soon the cherished friend of half a score middle-aged widows, fashionable demi-reps, and matrons with marriageable daughters. My noble grandpapa was not, however, so practicable as he might have been, had he not already learned wisdom. He listened, smiled, and—looked about him ; and the more he looked, the less chance had the ladies in question of making him their prey.

Many young and beautiful girls did he see in the hotbed of London society—girls in look, and women in mind—who would gladly have bartered their loveliness against his coronet ; but half of them were *parvenues*, and the other half nobodies.

Many a titled dowager, whose quarterings rendered her eligible for a German court circle, and whose diamonds were far brighter than her eyes, did not scruple to let him understand that she was not inexorable ; but my Lord Glenfillan was anxious for an heir. The very eligibles, the young, the beautiful, and the high-born—the creatures of his dreams—considered him too old, or too poor, or hated widowers, or could not contemplate the horror of being mothers-in-law ; and thus, *entre chien et loup*, he made no progress.

The London season was drawing to a close.

“ Fashion, you know, prescribes the minute
When to be out of it, and in it :
She waves her wand, and woe betide
The lingering few, unless they hide,
Or swear they’re passing through, to go
To Norfolk, in an hour or so ;
And mean, next month, to show their faces,
If possible, in twenty places.”

The Earl was just contemplating a journey to “ the Moors,” and sighing as he remembered that the solitude of Glenfillan must remain unbroken for another year ; when he was accidentally introduced to the honourable Dennis O’Finistree, who was on his way through town, with his fair sister Madelaine, whom he had escorted from Naples ; and who, after a brief sojourn in London, was to be his

companion to their paternal home in the wilds of Connaught.

Every one who is any one *must* know all about the O'Finistrees, so it were a mere waste of words for me to expatiate here upon the antiquity of their family, or to explain in what manner their patrimonial estate had dwindled into one-tenth of its original splendour, and "their noble," had actually as well as figuratively, "come to nimpence." They were also, as they always declared, lineally descended from the Kings of Connaught, (who, *soit dit en passant*, if all be true which is laid to their charge in this way, must have been wonderfully prolific!) an assertion which few persons felt disposed to question, for the O'Finistrees were all celebrated shots.

The honourable Dennis took a great fancy to my grandfather. He was a high-spirited, dashing, fine-looking young fellow, and a perfect man of the world. After a time he proposed to introduce his new friend to his sister, who was residing *perdue* at an hotel near Portman Square. The Earl thought of his star; and, without asking any questions, accepted the civility. He did right. Madelaine O'Finistree was a genuine Irish beauty, with dark hair and eyelashes, and eyes of a deep rich blue, which, when she laughed, looked positively black. She was tall, and well-proportioned;

had something of a foreign deportment, tempered, however, by extreme gracefulness ; and a spice of haughtiness which went straight to the heart of my grandfather.

Of course, the gay, thoughtless Dennis had never contemplated any serious results from the acquaintance of his sister and Lord Glenfillan. He could not have heard from his associates, that the Scotch peer had rejoiced in the name of " the wife-hunter " throughout the season ; and it could not consequently have been in the hope of " bringing down his bird " that he had detained Madelaine in London, when their finances had " dwindled to the shortest span," and that every guinea was to them thrice-refined gold. Nevertheless, everything fell out well. The Earl returned home, " seven fathom deep " in love with the fair Hibernian. He felt that his hour was come. She was so utterly unlike Jessie Macspleuchan. She was so graceful, so beautiful. Her proud brow looked as though (how novel-like is the phrase upon which I have stumbled!) Nature had designed to cincture it with a coronet. In short, Lord Glenfillan was a lost man, from half-past four o'clock p.m. on that 29th of June.

He was found again, however, a few months afterwards. The hatchment of the defunct lady had, years before, been consigned to the attic ; the Earl had almost forgotten her thrall ; and he was

flying along the highroad between London and Edinburgh in a travelling chariot and four, with the new Countess of Glenfillan by his side.

A year subsequently, my grandfather was once more a widower. His beautiful and high-born wife gave birth to a daughter, and in so doing, resigned her own life ; but it was a year of happiness which cast its spell over the after-existence of the bereaved husband. The first wish of his heart—the first object of his ambition, had indeed been disappointed. He had no son to inherit his name and honours ; but the memory of his young and gentle wife was, nevertheless, too dear to be obliterated by a newer tie.

His only consolation was derived from the fact, that she had left to him an infant image of herself, a second Madelaine, in whom, as she grew to womanhood, he might trace a renewal of her mother's beauty, and to whom he might thereafter devote his best affections for that mother's sake. Nay, so unaffected was the self-abnegation of the widowed father, that he gratefully accepted the proposal of an aunt of Mr. O'Finistree's, the widow of an old English Baronet, who divided her time between Wentworken Hall and her house in Cavendish Square, to take the motherless infant into her own care ; and so well did Lady Sinclair, who was herself childless, fulfil her voluntary duties,

that at each successive visit to England, the Earl found his daughter more beautiful, more graceful, and more accomplished than at their previous meeting.

At rare intervals, Lady Sinclair accompanied her niece to Glenfillan Castle, where they were met by Lady Flora and Miss Margery, who, on such occasions, contrived to display her housewifely capabilities to great advantage in the eyes of the Earl ; while she found so much and such serious occupation in the buttery and still-room, that she was rarely visible elsewhere. In short, Miss Margery was a genuine Macspleuchan, and as sharp as a needle ; and she looked upon these opportunities as “ the very skimming of her life’s milk,” as she herself graphically expressed it to a particular friend. It was now or never with her, and she played her cards well ; for when, on the death of Lady Sinclair, which happened just as Madelaine had completed her eighteenth year, Lord Glenfillan found it necessary to establish both his daughters beneath his own roof, he could not deny that she was the most correct and eligible person whom he could select, to relieve them from the drudgery of housekeeping, and to throw a matronly air over the establishment.

Fortunately also, as Lord Glenfillan considered, Macspleuchan of Macspleuchan had paid the debt

of nature, though he had left several less imperative debts unpaid ; and there being no son to perpetuate the name and vulgarity of his father, the Earl felt less repugnance to offering a home to the solitary Miss Margery.

Such, therefore, was the organization of Lord Glenfillan's household when my father became his guest. The lovely Lady Madelaine had already been an inmate of the Castle for a tedious year, during several months of which period she had been condemned to the sole companionship of her sister and her aunt ; the Earl's gout-expedition having taken him from home, before she had long been domesticated beneath his roof.

And now, how am I to describe the said Lady Madelaine ? I have said that she was just nineteen, that loveliest of all ages for a woman ; when, in addition to her own individual attractions, she possesses also what a French writer has wittily defined as *la beauté du diable*, that sweet and evanescent freshness, which, after the age of twenty, is gone for ever.

Like her mother, she was tall, and fair, and graceful, with regular and well-cut features ; eyes like amethysts ; and a mouth of that rare and peculiar description, which, when it is met with, appears to convey more expression than all the rest of the face combined. Her smile was the very

sunshine of the heart ; and her scorn was so naturally seated upon the arched and ruby lip, that it would have been insolent in any one of less rank than a peer's daughter. Perhaps, indeed, this latter expression was the more habitual one to that fair mouth ; for, unfortunately, the exclusive education and habits of Lady Madelaine had prepared her to find much to despise in her natural home ; nor did her French *suivante* suffer any of the deficiencies of either persons or things at Glenfillan to pass unobserved. The " Aunt Margery " of the elder sister never ceased to be the " Miss Macspleuchan " of the younger — an alien alike to her heart and to her blood. She never forgot that Lady Flora, although the first-born of an Earl, was nevertheless the child of a *roturière* ; and, as Félicie delicately expressed it, merely "*sa sœur par méprise*." The family-coach was a never-ceasing theme for contempt ; and the family expedients something almost too absurd to provoke a laugh.

From such of these as arose from certain deficiencies in the Glenfillan treasury, the haughty young beauty was happily exempt, Lady Sinclair having considerably wound up all her account of kindness and affection, by bequeathing several hundreds a-year to her beloved niece ; and, perhaps, to this circumstance might be attributed much of the

deference with which she was regarded by her female relatives.

But, although pride was the predominant feature of Lady Madelaine's character, it must not be supposed that she was destitute of other and more endearing qualities. Her generosity was unbounded. Her purse was a common property whenever it could be rendered available ; and her nature was enthusiastic and unsuspecting.

Thus, it was only to her very particular friends that Miss Margery ventured to pour out her vial of wrath against the "stuck-up English-bred quean who dared to look down upon her niece Flora, her own niece by blood, and own daughter to the Right Honourable the Earl of Glenfillan ; and herself, own sister as she was to the Right Honorable the Countess," in some of those quiet hours of gossipry and local scandal, which she contrived to secure in her morning room ; and which helped to support her through the tedium of a life, which, however enviable she had esteemed it so long as it appeared to be unattainable, she had since learnt to consider as an existence of constraint ; obliging her, as she graphically expressed it, "always to wear her company face." But, as Miss Margery was not a bad woman at heart, it is only fair to remark, that even after these little conferences, although they always were held "with

closed doors," her conscience frequently pricked her, as some act of uncalculating generosity on the part of the "stuck-up English-bred quean" towards herself suddenly flashed upon her mind.

Nor should the haughtiness of my mother—for the beautiful and accomplished Lady Madelaine *was* my mother; and, as I am not writing a melodrame, and have no genius for mystery, I may as well say so at once—nor should her haughtiness be too severely censured, inasmuch as it had been one of the darling endeavours of Lady Sinclair to impress her, from her earliest girlhood, with an exalted idea of her own position in society. Such a lesson is readily learnt, for few things are more susceptible than human vanity. "I will not," had said the cautious aunt, "talk to her, at so early an age, of her own personal attractions. The knowledge of those will come soon enough;" and so the discreet lady only poured the guano over the soil which was to produce "the Earl's daughter," and left the comments of her friends and servants to administer the unctuous matter which was to force into bloom the budding vanity of "the little beauty."

Thus she grew up—thanks to the care of her anxious teachers—moderately vain, and uncompromisingly haughty; whilst all her better qualities were the spontaneous growth of her own purer

and nobler nature. A solitary season in town, immediately before the death of her aunt, during which she had been "the observed of all observers," had not tended to diminish these failings; and thus, in her nineteenth year, the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan was possessed of a perfectly accurate knowledge of her own pretensions, both personal and social, only to be condemned without any consolation, save the companionship of her French maid and her Marlborough spaniel, to the solitude of a highland castle.

CHAPTER III.

And now some curious reader may wish to be informed what motive the Earl of Glenfillan, who, as the reader must have gathered, was by no means a wealthy man, could have had in pressing a casual acquaintance like my father, and one, moreover, to whom he owed money, to visit him in his home, and to see him surrounded by his *Dii Penates* in the undress costume of a Scottish country gentleman.

Heaven bless the *bonhomie* of the simple-hearted individual who ventures the inquiry! My lord had a penniless daughter, on the wrong side of thirty, still unmarried; and it had naturally suggested itself to his mind that her quality was an admirable counterpoise to my father's wealth; and that the luxurious commoner would be unable to resist the temptation of hearing himself and his wife announced as Mr. and Lady Flora Tilden, in the saloons of his London friends.

But those who calculate without their host require two reckonings. The noble lord did not understand my father. That he had resolved never to marry any woman save one of high rank, was perfectly true; but he was also determined that she should do as much credit to his taste as she would do honour to his name; and it was consequently in vain that poor Lady Flora had received that very mysterious injunction, which is frequently given to young ladies under such circumstances, to “make the most of herself;” and that Miss Margery announced, in close conclave to her favourite gossips, that a Southron, worth his weight in gold, was coming to the Castle to marry her pet niece.

I think I mentioned, when I originally introduced the reader to the Earl’s family circle, that the Lady Flora was all smiles and welcome: she was doing as she was bid; and, after her first glance at the stranger, she found the task by no means difficult. My father bowed and smiled, and his bow was very graceful, and his smile very gracious, but his eyes had already wandered to a sofa, which was occupied by a beautiful girl and a small lapdog. Having said all that she could well say at such a moment, the Lady Flora suffered Lord Glenfillan to lead his guest towards his other daughter; and the fair vision by which he had

already been attracted bent her snowy throat in a mute salutation, worthy of an empress. Something like a mocking smile played for an instant about her mouth ; but she did not raise her eyes, as she again fell back upon her cushions, and pursued her occupation of clasping a string of coral about the neck of the spaniel.

She was plainly but richly dressed in deep mourning, which she had never thrown off since the death of her aunt ; and the dazzling whiteness of her neck and arms was rendered still more conspicuous from the contrast. I shall enter into no further detail. I have already stated that my mother was eminently beautiful ; and, having given the grand outline of the picture, I will leave my reader to wash in the tints as he may see fit.

The curtain had now fairly risen upon the drama which was to be enacted at Glenfillan. Like the renowned Marquis of Carabbas, the Earl believed that the world and all its contents, sentient and non-sentient, were created for the comfort and convenience of the aristocracy ; while no price could be too high for the plebeian to pay, for the privilege of entering its charmed circle ; and, with these sentiments, it is not wonderful that he considered the marriage of his elder daughter as certain as though it had been solemnized at St. George's, Hanover Square, " in the presence of a select

circle of "distinguished friends." It would be a dignified, and lordly, (and convenient) way of repaying all his obligations to his worthy guest: and he resolved that he would do the thing freely, and cordially, and as though he scarcely looked upon it as a condescension.

Oh, delicious self-delusion! In what exquisite mummery does poor human nature occasionally indulge!

For a time my father had no suspicion of the generous intentions of the Earl. How should he? It was only by the common and necessary courtesies of life that he was recalled to the fact of Lady Flora's existence. His heart had soon followed the thrall of his eyes. He was passionately in love with the scornful Madelaine; she was precisely what novel-writers call "the realization of his dreams;" and, for the first time in his life, my father began to believe that he had found a woman of whom he was not worthy: for that Lord Glenfillan should have had the audacity to couple him even in thought with his elder daughter, was an idea which could never enter his imagination, until it was driven home to the very head by a determined hand.

Nevertheless, it was easy for lookers-on to perceive that the Earl quite considered the rich Englishman, (to use a phrase of Madame de

Seigné,) as *un chou de son jardin*. Nothing could exceed his delightful urbanity. In his self-gratulation at having caught such a gudgeon for his first-born, he performed upon himself exactly the same ceremony to which Mr. Pettigrew subjects his mummies. One stiff fold was cautiously unrolled after another, until at length the complete “form and fashion” of his gracious composition was laid bare, and his whole purpose stood revealed to his astonished guest.

Meanwhile, as I have said, the *dessous des cartes* was palpable enough to all save the pre-occupied lover. Every one could at once have laid a finger upon the truth. Lady Madelaine, indeed, was not left to the natural perspicacity of her own nature. She was duly informed by the Earl of his lordship’s condescending intentions; and, at the moment, she opened wide both her fine eyes and her ruby lips, in intended expostulation; but an instant’s reflection decided her to silence. Who shall determine wherefore? I think that I am myself sufficiently cognizant of the impulses and intricacies of a pretty woman’s heart to give a shrewd guess—but I forbear.

Miss Margery was radiant with happiness. She had lived long enough in her youth among the involved expedients and manœuvres, to which those housewives devote themselves who act upon the

homely old proverb that "a penny saved's a penny got," to appreciate at its full value the extent of my father's wealth, so far as she was enabled to comprehend it. To be sure, as she remarked more than once to her pet gossip, "her niece Lady Flora Glenfillan had a right to look higher; but 'a fat purse makes lean sorrow;' and if she gained no title by this marriage, she would, at least, not lose her own."

My father had been bidden to the Castle for "a few weeks;" and when three of these sectional periods of time had elapsed, desperately, as he loved the Lady Madelaine, he felt that as she had "made no sign," despite all his efforts to awaken her from her indifference, it was incumbent upon him to appear occupied with parting intentions, leaving it for awhile to absence and memory to work some miracle in his behalf; but this free flight of the yet unjessed falcon formed no part of the Earl's scheme. He could not tell, if he thus launched the noble bird once more into the wide horizon of London society, what quarry he might chance to strike; and, moreover, there were, as I have already hinted, some small pecuniary matters still pending between them, which at that particular moment it was not altogether convenient to himself to investigate; it was, consequently, not surprising that, with such strong reasons on either

side to remain together, the importunities of the Earl, breathing, as they did, all the disinterestedness of overflowing hospitality, soon convinced my father that the weeks of his residence at Glenfillan might grow into months, without any impropriety on his part; an arrangement which would enable him, in all probability, to ascertain his fate before he parted from Lady Madelaine.

My father was no petulant and peevish lover. He had wisdom enough to feel that if he were indeed compelled to renounce all hope of winning the noble beauty, the sooner he was made conscious of the fact the better; and that he should be less an object of commiseration to himself on his departure, if knowing the truth, even although it should be an unpleasant one, than living on in a state of uncertainty for months; only, perhaps, to be ultimately disappointed, when time had rendered the one engrossing subject of his thoughts essential to the after-happiness of his life.

The only disinterested member of the family was the little Marlborough spaniel, which, as it lay on the sofa beside its mistress, rolled its bright eyes over the group, with an expression of luxurious and languid indifference.

To the hospitable entreaties of the Earl that my father would extend his visit, both Lady Flora and Miss Margery added their own; but the younger

lady, toward whom the guest glanced anxiously more than once during the discussion, preserved a profound and apparently unobservant silence. Lord Glenfillan was so earnest that he became heated by his own eloquence. Miss Macspleuchan, when she reflected upon the probable consequences of the "rich Southron's" departure, grew positively agitated. She had so long accustomed herself to look upon his marriage with her favourite niece as a matter of course—for the Earl had duly informed her also of his gracious purposes, even before my father's arrival at the Castle—that she actually felt herself aggrieved ; and she sat fuming and fidgeting, like one labouring in silence under an affront which would gladly have revenged itself in words. But Lady Flora surpassed all the other actors in this exciting scene. At first she had mingled her own entreaties with those of her father ; then, suddenly, she sank into silence, keeping her eyes steadily and imploringly fixed upon the yielding guest, who had no sooner murmured the assent for which she was so eagerly listening, than, uttering a faint and smothered exclamation, she covered her face with her hands, and rushed from the room.

By a spontaneous movement the Earl seized the hand of his guest, and wrung it earnestly, with a most expressive gravity of countenance. Miss Margery rose hastily, in a state of great alarm, and

followed her niece ; and, it so chanced that, at the same moment, a servant entered to announce that a gentleman who had called by appointment was awaiting Lord Glenfillan in the library.

For the first time since his residence in the Castle, the Lady Madelaine and my father were *tête-à-tête*.

It was a sufficiently perplexing position for the visitor, who could not quite repress his mortification at the studied indifference of his young hostess ; nor was the difficulty lessened by the fact that, even when she heard her father summoned from the room, she never raised her eyes from the book upon which she had been engaged throughout the conference. The Earl had been enchanted with her dignified reserve, forming, as it did, so admirable a contrast to her sister's emotion ; and he had consequently made no effort to obtain her co-operation. Miss Margery considered that, for once, she had acted with proper discretion in not interfering with the prospects of her elder : while Lady Flora herself was so absorbed by her own hopes and fears, that she had utterly forgotten her existence.

Poor Lady Flora, meanwhile, was really an object of pity. She had been pompously instructed by her father to overlook Mr. Tilden's want of rank, when he was first expected, and to accept at once the hand which would assuredly be at her

disposal before he left Scotland, and even then she felt no whit inclined to disobey, for her position in her paternal home was by no means hyper-pleasurable. She heard that the Englishman was immensely rich, and unusually handsome ; and when the Earl admitted that he had reason to believe, from certain words which had dropped from Mr. Tilden himself, that he had been at some period engaged in commerce, he somewhat abruptly reminded her that this fact would by no means render the match a *mésalliance*, as it would have done in the case of Lady Madelaine ; her own mother having, previously to her marriage with himself, occupied a station much less exalted than that of an English merchant.

Lady Flora felt no inclination to contend the question. She was satisfied with complaining of the taunt to her sympathizing aunt. She had almost begun to consider her establishment as hopeless ; for even among the petty lairds who were occasionally received at the Castle, there was a sufficient taste for youth and beauty to fortify them against the *prestige* of her rank ; and strangers were rarely indeed guests at Glenfillan.

Like many persons whose means have been inadequate to their pretensions, Lady Flora had an inordinate idea of the power of wealth. She could conceive no earthly evil, save death itself, to

which it could not afford a remedy—while even to this exception it lent a sort of glory which almost divested it of its bitterness—the glory of lead, and mahogany, and gold-headed nails: of armorial bearings, and velvet, and feathers. The rich man's last sad and solemn mockery !

In this acquiescent mood of mind, she met my father ; and what had at first been mere curiosity and self-gratulation, soon grew into a deeper feeling. Although utterly unable to appreciate, as they deserved, either the elegance of his person, or the refinement of his manner, Lady Flora could nevertheless feel that he was, to every man save her father, with whom she had hitherto been brought into contact, as “ Hyperion to a Satyr.” Assured that she was to become his wife, she made no attempt to check the admiration with which she regarded him ; and, from day to day, the feeling grew and strengthened, until she began, for the first time, to indulge in a violent jealousy of her young and beautiful sister.

Despite the remonstrances of Miss Margery, who affected to talk of Lady Madelaine as a froward child, she could not blind herself to the fact that she was a most formidable rival ; and it was only the dreaded beauty herself who succeeded in relieving the mind of Lady Flora from its unaccustomed weight. Her coldness, her indifference, her apparent

abstraction, ultimately satisfied the more vehement and less refined mind of the bride presumptive that she was perfectly uninterested in the English stranger; and she accordingly pursued the even tenour of her way, arranging with her prime minister, Miss Margery, all her intended movements, when she should have become Lady Flora Tilden, the mistress of countless thousands, and the titled member of an untitled family, who would, as a matter of course, appreciate the honour of her alliance. Miss Margery's projects of housewifery were miraculous, and would have astonished Meg Dodds herself; while those of her niece, although their magnificence did not fail to dazzle the conspirators by whom they were mooted, would have made no very serious inroad upon my father's income.

Singular, meanwhile, had been the transition-state of Lady Madelaine's feelings. When first informed of the expected advent of the English stranger, and the intended purpose of the Earl, she only curled her lip, and murmured something which sounded like "*rôtureur!*" at which Lord Glenfillan laughed, patted her smooth cheek, and bade her remember that it was not herself whom he was anxious to establish. Her own independence of the arrangement she could easily understand; nor was her noble father's anxiety to provide for her plain,

and as Félicie called her, *antediluvian* sister, at all difficult to comprehend ; but the result of the conference was a deep and scornful contempt for the moneyed plebeian, who could thus be disposed of at the will of a titled acquaintance. So utter, indeed, was her disdain, that she never heard his name mentioned without a feeling of annoyance. The unknown guest was her *bête noire* ; and she shuddered as she reflected on the absolute necessity of showing civility to such a brother-in-law.

When they at length met, the graceful, and withal haughty, demeanour of my father, in some degree, disturbed her calculations ; but as she had a most powerful prejudice to overcome, she almost persuaded herself that she disliked him. The high-bred simplicity of his character ; his utter want of value for wealth, save as a mean for the attainment of higher objects, she denounced as a pitiful affectation. How was it possible that a man should underestimate his only advantage ?

Three weeks, as I have already stated, had elapsed from the arrival of my father at Glenfillan Castle, to the morning on which he announced his intention of departure. Why did the volume, upon which the Lady Madelaine appeared to be so earnestly engaged, tremble in her clasp ? No, sapient reader ! you are wrong. She did *not* love my father. And yet his threatened evasion affected

her powerfully. Here is the word of the enigma. In the first place, Lady Madelaine was a woman : in the next place, she was a pretty woman : and, in the third place, she was young and vain. She had soon suspected that my father loved her : she had penetration and judgment enough to decide that he was a gentleman, and that he was quite conscious of all that was due to himself as such ; to all which convictions was superadded the fact that, since her domestication at Glenfillan, she had never previously seen any one on whom it would not have been *caviare* to expend her brilliant coquetries. There was something *piquante*, too, in the idea of having, without one poor effort, won the heart which was already considered as “property” by another, although that other did chance to be plain and antediluvian ; and there was, *par dessus tout*, a spice of mortification in being compelled to believe that the net was too frail to hold the capture.

And thus it chanced, gracious reader, that the volume *did* tremble in the clasp of the Lady Madelaine, when my father announced his intention to depart on the morrow. Lady Flora had, as I have stated, rushed from the room in the attitude of a tragic actress : Miss Margery had followed with more good will than dignity ; his lordship of Glenfillan had been summoned to an interview ; and the

Lady Madelaine and my father were, for the first time in their lives, *tête-à-tête*.

For a moment there was silence. My father stood where his host had left him, near the table in the centre of the vast apartment ; and the lady sat, half buried amid her cushions, in a lounging-chair near the open window. The position was embarrassing for the gentleman ; but he soon rallied, and, approaching the silent beauty, remarked steadily—

“ If I could only flatter myself that the Lady Madelaine was not utterly indifferent to my decision....”

He was met by such a look of scornful wonderment that he was at once answered ; for it said, as plainly as a look *could* say : “ How do you imagine that it can have awakened my interest ?” and then the large eyes were once more dropped upon the book, and their long, dark lashes rested like a fringe upon the slightly-suffused cheek. My father bowed profoundly, with a haughtiness worthy of Lady Madelaine herself, and turned to leave the room.

“ Do not mistake me, sir ;” said the sweet voice to which he loved to listen, before he had traversed the floor ; “ I am happy that Lord Glenfillan should have been enabled to render his residence sufficiently

agreeable to his guest, to make him willing to extend his visit ; but I have never considered myself privileged to interfere with any of my father's arrangements."

There must have been something infinitely less cold in the tone than in the words of this address ; for it is certain that, instead of leaving the room according to his original intention, my father reversed his movement, and again approached the lady.

This was her first triumph. She felt that she had not deceived herself—that he could not leave her coldly—that he *did* love her. The conviction brought a bloom to her cheek. Her woman-vanity was satisfied ; and she valued his preference the more that she had seen him in the very act of sacrificing his passion to his pride. Accustomed as she had been since her girlhood to admiration, she felt the dreary and monotonous tenour of her life at Glenfillan agreeably relieved by the certainty of a new adorer ; and one, too, whom in her heart of hearts she was conscious that she could not despise. With these sentiments, nothing could be more natural than that she should be averse to the departure of so eligible an inmate.

Let no rigid moralist decide that this course of action involved treachery to Lady Flora. My mother was well aware, before the Englishman had

passed a week in the Castle, that her father's project must fail. He was not one of those manageable and will-less beings, who are mere human thistle-down, sailing without reluctance along any wind which may chance to blow; and still less did he resemble the mean-spirited parasites who feel security only in the stability of the object to which they cling. She had long been convinced that even had there existed no Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, there would assuredly never have been a Lady Flora Tilden. *My* father and *her* sister were, as she at once discovered, the very antipodes of each other; they were oil and water—snow and fire—romance and reality—sentiment and matter-of-fact—the two extremities of a straight line, never destined by any possibility to come together; and, such being the case, her conscience was at ease as regarded her duty to her family, while she felt no inclination to forego the opportunity of relieving her own *ennui*.

If I go on amplifying my explanations so largely, however, I shall never terminate the *tête-à-tête* upon which I have ventured to intrude; and I will, therefore, resume it with the second arrival of my father beside the lounging-chair. Pygmalion had at least awakened the statue into life, and he was naturally anxious to ascertain in how far his skill would turn to his own advantage.

“Do you indeed believe, Lady Madelaine,” he asked, in the same suppressed voice in which he had first spoken, “that your presence under his lordship’s roof can fail to exert a despotic power over all within the sphere of its influence? And am I to be the only unfortunate individual to whom it is forbidden to acknowledge its supremacy? Surely this is somewhat ungenerous!”

“Nay, nay!” exclaimed the lady, with a half coquettish and all-harmonious laugh, as she extended towards him her small white hand; “you remain here, and we cannot afford, in such a solitude as this, to live together in enmity. At all events, I propose a truce.”

“And I accept your terms,” said my father, bending his lips upon the hand he held.

“Do you admire Racine?” asked the lady, raising her beautiful eyes to his face for an instant; “with all his monotony of cadence, surely he was a great poet.”

“And lived in a great age;” was the reply; “great alike in its luxury, its ambition, and its vices. It is, I confess, somewhat difficult to me, as I turn over the pages of his tragic dramas, to figure to myself the author of *Andromache* following the caprices of a court, and the chances of a camp.”—(By this time my father had drawn a chair near that of the lady, and established him-

self comfortably at her side).—"Nor do I find it more easy to reconcile the pliability of temperament which enabled the man of genius to vie with a group of witless courtiers in flattering a vain and sensual monarch, beyond the bounds of modesty and reason."

"Racine!" exclaimed the Lady Madelaine, interested in spite of herself by the turn which her own question had given to the conversation; "I do not remember to what you allude. Perhaps you will relate the anecdote."

"It is brief and simple;" said my father. "When Louis XIV. pensioned Racine and Despreaux as the historians of his reign, the war against Germany was still at its height; and a few days after the Marshal de Crequi compelled the Prince of Saxe and Senac to capitulate, the King remarked to them that he regretted their absence from the army upon that occasion, as it would have enabled them to see a little fighting, without much exertion or fatigue; upon which Racine replied, 'Sire, we are two citizens, who have only provided ourselves with a costume suited to peace and study; we had indeed ordered suits more appropriate to the camp, but your Majesty takes the places which you attack with such rapidity, that our tailors have not had time to finish them.' Surely this was unworthy of a great genius."

“ Paltry and pitiful !” acquiesced the lady, with a contemptuous toss of her little head ; “ a woman would have spurned so coarse and so fulsome a flattery.”

Now I am quite sure that my reader was totally unprepared for such a dialogue as this ; and yet, although it progressed in precisely the same manner to its close, and that not one word of gallantry escaped the lips of my father, and not one sentence of encouragement was uttered by those of his companion, both parties were conscious, when the re-appearance of the Earl broke up the conversation, that each was an object of interest to the other. My father had, by a delicacy of tact natural to him, avoided every opportunity of alarming the pride of the young beauty, and consequently made more progress in her favour than he could have done by a score of idle flatteries. She was indebted to him for an hour of calm and rational enjoyment ; and, moreover, she felt she had convinced him that her beauty was not the only quality for which she was worthy to be loved.

CHAPTER IV.

My father's orders were countermanded. His valet somewhat sullenly, and very reluctantly, replaced all the costly toys on the dressing-table, and returned all the linen to the drawers. There was no Lady Madelaine in the servants' hall.

A few days subsequently the Earl ceased to address his guest as "Mr. Tilden;" he believed that he had now all the court-cards in his own hand; and it was simply "Tilden," or "My dear fellow." He made no comment upon the fact that both gun and fishing-rod were abandoned, and that my father lounged away all his mornings beside the work-table of the ladies, tuning Lady Madelaine's guitar, or drawing patterns for her sister's worstedwork.

By the by, Lady Flora never looked so completely as though she were fulfilling the end of her creation, as when seen behind her frame, and amid piles of German wool. The laborious idleness of this

heating and ponderous employment just suited her capacity. She felt that she was busy, that she appeared industrious ; and, moreover, nothing could be more convenient than the fact that when she ventured to take part in a conversation to which she was not competent, and could not readily extricate herself from the consequences of her own temerity, she found a never-failing resource in the “ one, two, three, light green—two, dark green—one, two, three, yellow”—and so on, by which she contrived to wind up her periods.

This was, however, a case of “ voluntary labour ;” for I do not believe that either Lady Madelaine or my father would have remarked the circumstance, even had she strangled every sentence in the utterance.

Miss Margery was the only blot upon this picture of still life. She was so essentially what the French denominate *remuante*, that she was never quiet in one place for half an hour together. If her niece were born to execute large pieces of worstedwork, which, when they were finished (and very few elaborate undertakings of this nature ever *are* finished), looked almost as well as squares of indifferently-woven carpet ; she was as certainly sent into the world to

——“ chronicle small beer ;”

and, accordingly, her minute avocations were, if

not altogether without aim, decidedly without end.

But, alas ! this state of things could not last for ever. The Earl, quite convinced of the wisdom and desirability of his own arrangements, never suffered himself to doubt, for a moment, to which of his daughters Mr. Tilden was devoting himself. Of course, he would not presume to lift his eyes to the Lady Madelaine ; and, equally of course, the large fortune of the handsome commoner should not be allowed to go out of the family. Nothing, therefore, could have happened better. The Glenfillan star was in the ascendant. Flora would soon be provided for ; and he should only have to find a suitable and satisfactory *parti* for his beautiful Madelaine. In this there could be no difficulty. The climax of his reflections was their most rational feature.

All these fair visions, dovetailing so pleasantly together in his mind, like

“ A linked chain of sweetness long drawn out,” naturally rendered him anxious to force forward their realization ; and my father was accordingly disturbed one morning,—just as he was deeply engaged in looking over, with Lady Madelaine, a portfolio of drawings and prints by which he had illustrated his European tour, and accompanying each landscape or costume with some appropriate

anecdote—by a message from the Earl, requesting, should Mr. Tilden not be otherwise employed, the pleasure of his company in his lordship's study.

Apropos—What a singular caprice it is on the part of all stupid men to nickname one cosy, snug, sleep-inviting little apartment in their houses by this imposing name; crowding its walls with shelves full of books which they never read, and its tables with paper upon which they never write! I rarely enter one of these calumniated cabinets without thinking of the Bashful Man in the Spectator, who, in helping himself to what he supposed to be a volume of Xenophon, drew down on his unhappy head a ponderous board, leathered and gilt into the fair semblance of a set of classics; and expended upon his best suit the ink of the capacious stand which had been destined to dry up in quiet and undisturbed dignity. He is probably not the only individual who has suffered from a similar mistake.

The request was peculiarly ill-timed, for my father felt that he had never yet been listened to with an attention so marked and flattering. The fair lady had taken so unaffected an interest in the little episodes of his travelling life, and had received with so much genuine pleasure the half dozen drawings and cameos, which he had ventured to offer to her, that a bright hope sprang up in his heart

which he had never before entertained. There was, however, no remedy for the evil. Common politeness compelled his immediate acquiescence in the Earl's request; and he closed the portfolio with a little gesture of impatience, easily interpreted by his companion.

"I beseech you, do not run away with it;" she said smilingly; "if you have sufficient confidence in my good taste to believe that it will prove a charming resource for my indolence, while my lord asks your advice on some matter of agricultural interest, or country justice; though I warn you that I may probably lay aside all that strikes my fancy; and condemn you, on your return, to such graphic and legendary illustration as may sorely try your patience."

"I will willingly encounter the risk, hazardous though it be," replied my father as he left the room, with a firm intention to render the period of his absence as short as possible.

His own impression, as, preceded by the grave old butler, he wended his way to the Earl's sanctum, was simply that Lord Glenfillan was probably in want of a few additional hundreds, and was about to do him the honour of asking them at his hands; and no idea could possibly have been more agreeable to my father. It would be another link of kindness and good will between them; and he was

naturally anxious to create these by every means in his power, while this was one of the most ready and easy which he could encounter.

One glance at my lord, as he entered the room, however, sufficed to undeceive him. The Earl had by no means the appearance of a man about to ask a loan. There was a self-gratulatory graciousness about him, which for an instant made my father fear that, on the contrary, he was about to rescind that which he had already contracted. But, in this, he was equally at fault.

Lord Glenfillan was in the true study costume : a brocaded silk dressing-gown, yellow morocco slippers, and a velvet scull-cap. He was rubbing his palms together gently and quietly, like a person well-satisfied, who was prepared to be amiable ; and when tired of this amusement, he indulged the vivacity of his spirit by twirling the tassels which were attached to the cord that confined his dressing-gown at the waist. He motioned my father to an easy chair with a sweet smile and a graceful wave of the hand ; and seated himself opposite to him with much the same air as a monarch assumes when he is about to give audience. He had evidently more trouble in "toning down" his urbanity, than in creating a semblance to the monarch when he had it not. He was, in short, the embodiment of human sunshine.

He opened the conference with a sapient remark upon the weather. The dense fog which, at day-break, hung like a dark cloud upon the lake, and made the larches on the opposite hill quite invisible from the windows, had really cleared off in a most extraordinary manner. Indeed, he did not know when he had seen a finer day. It was almost a sin in a young man, like his friend Tilden, to remain mewed up in the house when he might be amid the heather with his gun upon his shoulder. He, however, could not but feel the contrary mode of action as a vast compliment to his family circle; and was delighted to find that there was amusement enough within the Castle walls, to satisfy so truant a personage as his present guest.

My father, of course, could only bow, and smile, and declare that he could expect no enjoyment without, even upon the heathery hills, with sport at pleasure, to equal that which he could command within. And then there was a short pause. The guest waited to learn what was to be the subject of the *tête-à-tête*; and the host did not altogether know how to broach it.

At length he assumed his most sunny look, and throwing himself back upon his seat, while he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon an experiment which he was trying, and which consisted in joining the fingers of his two hands at the point; and then,

closing the palms slowly and carefully together, as though he were anxious to convince himself that they were both perfectly of a size, he said, in an accent of great benignity—

“ I am more than pleased, my dear fellow, that it should be so ; for, although no longer young myself, I have not yet quite forgotten that men of your age do not abandon the sports of the field, and the manly exercises to which they are accustomed, without a powerful inducement ; and, even delicately situated as I am, I cannot resist telling you, Tilden, how much I rejoice that such should be the case.”

And the Earl, having by this time satisfied himself that his hands were indubitably fellows, extended one of them to his visitor, with a frankness which was quite beautiful.

My father was somewhat startled, but still more gratified. He eagerly grasped the offered hand, and was about to reply, when, with a nod of intelligence, Lord Glenfillan continued :

“ I am the last man in the world, as I am sure that you who know me will concede at once, to approve of female demonstration in delicate affairs of this kind : but still, I am aware that women, even of the purest minds and most refined natures, have certain little occult methods of testifying their preference, of which they are themselves almost

unconscious, but which must carry conviction to the mind of the person so distinguished ; nor do I fear to have deceived myself, in the belief that you have both experienced and reciprocated these evidences in my dear girl."

" My lord," exclaimed my father earnestly : " this is indeed noble on your part ! For I cannot, I will not affect, to misinterpret the generous feeling which has prompted you to speak thus openly. I only fear that your friendship for me has led you to exaggerate in my favour the few slight marks of attention with which the lady has honoured me."

" Tush ! tush ! " coughed his lordship, suppressing under this slight convulsion the smile that was rising to his lips ; " I will be your security ; and, had I valued you less, either as a man or as a friend, than I actually do, I would not have been so imprudent as to domesticate you for weeks together with my daughters. Had I been merely ambitious for them, I might doubtlessly have married them to rank equal, if not superior, to my own ; but I am at once a father, and a man of the world. As the first, I desire only their happiness. As the second, I feel that I shall be more honoured in a son-in-law like yourself, than in many a titled booby, who has but his ancestry to keep his folly and his vice in countenance. Permit me—" (for my father

was about to speak)—“ I did not request the pleasure of your presence here this morning in order that we might bandy compliments, but simply that man to man we might speak openly and frankly *on equal ground* ;”—(Here the emphasis was ponderous ; and the Earl coughed again, for he felt that he had surpassed himself :) “ If I am not deceived, and that you love my daughter, say so unreservedly ; and I, on my side, will venture to assure you that you are not indifferent to her.”

“ My lord,” said my father in considerable agitation, “ I *do* love her, and that with no common affection, but with the whole energy of a heart which had ever hitherto been insensible to the attractions of her sex.”

“ I rejoice extremely to hear it,” replied Lord Glenfillan, “ extremely ; and the rather that, like your own, hers, I can venture to affirm, is also her first love. Such marriages are of rare occurrence in the world at the present day.”

And the Earl looked intelligent and sententious, and as though he had discovered the nest of the phoenix, and was about to rifle its ashes.

“ Will your lordship pardon me,” said the visitor, “ if, despite the encouragement which your opinion is so well calculated to hold out, I venture to hesitate, ere I yield to the hope of so much happiness ; for *I* cannot conceal from myself the con-

viction, that the lady has never given me the most remote cause to believe that she entertained any regard for me, save that which she considered to be my due as her noble father's guest."

"And yet, my dear Tilden, I am so well convinced to the contrary," replied the Earl, "that we will, if you please, lay aside that consideration this morning, in order to discuss others of more moment. But first" (and once more he extended his hand, with a gesture of affectionate and paternal frankness), "let me tell you that you have made me a happy man—a very happy man. My dear, motherless girls are my greatest treasure on earth; and to feel that, to all human seeming, I have secured the happiness of one of them, is indeed a great comfort. Having premised thus much, however, I consider it due to myself, as a man of honour and a gentleman, to warn you, before the affair is mentioned to my daughter, that I shall be enabled to do little, very little, for her, as regards fortune."

"My dear lord!..."

"Nay, my good sir, do me the favour to hear me out. The failure of a son to succeed to my title and estates, and who would, moreover, have doubtlessly felt it to be his duty to portion his sisters as became their rank, has trammelled me in a painful degree. The future Earl of Glenfillan is a

morose recluse, with a needy family of five boys. There is nothing to be expected from him ; and the rather, that there has been feud between us for the last twenty years. In fact, we were never friends, even from our boyhood. He was apt to presume upon our relationship ; and I, Mr. Tilden, was, on my side, quite willing to forget it. Enough, however, of the future Earl. The fortunes which I can offer with my daughters are, consequently, only the fruits of my personal economy ; and I am, therefore, anxious that the little which they do possess should be secured to them."

" Suffer me to be equally concise, my lord," said my father, when there was a pause. " I am ready to settle ten thousand a year upon the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, to be disposed of as she shall see fit at her demise ; and—"

" To settle upon *whom*, sir ?" asked the Earl, grasping his knees with his hands, and leaning forward in his chair, until his face almost touched that of his companion.

" Upon your lordship's daughter, the Lady Madelaine."

" The Lady Madelaine !" gasped out the bewildered nobleman. " Surely you never imagined, sir, that I was offering to you the hand of the Lady Madelaine !"

" I know not how otherwise to interpret your

lordship's words ;" said my father, with offended dignity ; " I cannot suppose that such an interview was intended as a jest."

" Have I not two daughters, sir? Does not a father naturally seek to establish the elder? Is the Lady Flora a cipher? I offered to you, sir, the hand of the Lady Flora."

" In that case, my lord," said the guest rising from his seat, " our conference is ended. I have the greatest possible respect for Lady Flora Glenfillan ; but I must be excused if I decline to become the husband of any woman for whom I could never entertain a warmer feeling. I deeply regret the misunderstanding which has led to so unpleasant a scene ; but feel satisfied that both the lady and yourself will exonerate me from blame, when you have calmly and in detail passed my conduct in review."

" I have uttered no word of blame, sir," said the Earl sullenly, as he also rose : " I confess myself deceived by appearances, by probabilities—perhaps somewhat by the bent of my own wishes."

My father bowed coldly. " Has your lordship any commands for England?"

" Nay, nay, Mr. Tilden, do not be so precipitate;" said his host, in a more conciliatory tone. " Because I have confessed that I desired you as a son-in-law, and that you have declined the alliance

which I proposed, we need not, in consequence, become strangers—I will not say enemies; for I know my own nature, and have too good an opinion of yours, to believe such an extreme probable.”

“ You do no more than justice to both of us, my lord;” replied my father; “ but, my eyes being now opened to the hopelessness of an attachment which I have not scrupled to confess, I will be frank enough to avow, moreover, that I dare not remain within the influence of the Lady Madeleine’s beauty, for the sake of my own peace. I *may* yet be enabled to overcome the passion which I have conceived for her. I will, at all events, struggle to do so: but the longer I expose myself to the charms of an intercourse, which brings me into constant contact with her lovely person and accomplished mind, the less hope can I rationally entertain of regaining the peace that I have lost. I have, as I believe I may have mentioned to your lordship, occasionally contemplated a voyage to the East. I will now execute that intention. I shall leave none behind to regret me, be my fate what it may.”

There was a sadness, almost a bitterness, in the tone with which the last words were uttered, which served as a fair apology for the emotion with which the Earl grasped the arm of his companion, as he exclaimed hurriedly—

“ For my own sake, for the sake of hospitality, my good sir, I cannot suffer you to leave Glenfillan in such a mood of mind. Surely you have roved about enough, and owe something to your country and your friends.”

“ My friends are few ;” was the reply, “ and to my country I can be of no service whatever. I have now only to learn to live for myself, and the lesson is scarcely worth the pains that it will cost.”

“ Nay, nay—the world has too many claims upon you, to suffer that you should fall into misanthropy ;” persisted Lord Glenfillan. “ Your very wealth multiplies your duties, while it assures you alike power and enjoyment.”

“ Do not mock me, my lord,” said my father, with increased bitterness ; “ an hour has not yet elapsed since your own words taught me the amount of each, which riches could command. After what has passed between us, I feel that I must necessarily be *de trop* under your roof, both to the Ladies Glenfillan and to myself.”

“ Do not wrong *them*—do not wrong us *all*, my dear Tilden. Be ruled for once. Again I beg of you not to leave us in such a mood of mind. Indeed we cannot spare you at this moment. You have made several engagements with the ladies, for which they depend on you. Promise me that

you will not leave us with a suddenness which may excite surprise, and perhaps remark. I ask this as a favour."

"Your lordship's request is undoubtedly too flattering to be opposed;" said my father. "I will not leave the Castle, at least, for a day or two, since such is really your wish; but suffer me now to retire to my room, for I feel that I am somewhat agitated, and shall be better alone."

"Ten thousand a year!" muttered the Earl, as he again sank into his chair, when my father had left the room: "ten thousand a year, to be disposed of at will, on her demise! and—I wonder what was to follow! Could I have suppressed my annoyance, I might have heard all. Fool that I am! I ought to have foreseen that a fellow as proud as Lucifer, and as rich as Cræsus, would never marry Flora.—I wonder if Madelaine might be induced to bend her proud spirit to the match. Certain it is, that she will never again have such an opportunity. However, *au jour la journée*, I must detain him here, and trust to time and fortune for the rest."

And having finished his soliloquy, the Earl rang his bell, and desired a servant to summon the Lady Madelaine.

CHAPTER V.

In about ten minutes the Lady Madelaine appeared, followed by her Marlborough spaniel, who, with all the confidence of a spoiled favourite, intruded himself into the conference.

There was an expression of tremour and anxiety about the young beauty, very unusual; and, as she took possession of the chair to which the Earl motioned her, she raised her eyes to his face with an earnestness which bespoke at once curiosity and alarm.

“ You will never believe, Madelaine,” commenced Lord Glenfillan, “ that I have requested your presence here on such a subject as the refusal of a commoner to form an alliance with my family.”

The cheeks and forehead of the lady grew suddenly crimson, and her eyes flashed; but she did not utter a syllable.

“ I see how sensibly—how deeply—you feel this affront,” pursued her father; “ for which you must

have been as unprepared as I myself was ; but high birth and noble blood are now at a discount in this country—gold is the great principle with all ranks. Yet I cannot avoid thinking that, after the extreme step which I took in mooting the subject, when I was decidedly the condescending party, Mr. Tilden should have been less abrupt in his negative.”

“ Surely, my dear father—surely, my lord,” said the Lady Madelaine, in a tone of offended dignity, “ you did not *offer* your daughter’s hand to Mr. Tilden !”

“ Certainly not—decidedly not—” was the sententious answer. “ Your delicacy alone makes you jump to such a conclusion. I flatter myself that I conducted the affair in a manner at once dignified and diplomatic ; and, for a considerable time, I had every reason to conclude that Mr. Tilden was transported with gratitude and happiness—but—in short—can you not imagine how the *equivoque* arose?—can you not guess in what his rejection of Lady Flora’s hand originated?”

His fair daughter had suddenly become singularly interested in disentangling two curls of one of the long and lustrous ears of her little favourite ; and she did not immediately reply.

“ That Mr. Tilden had become strongly attached to some member of my family was evident,” con-

tinued the Earl ; “ and I accordingly never entertained a doubt that my project for the establishment of your sister had fully succeeded. I *could* not suppose that he had become enamoured of Miss Margery Macspleuchan”—here his lordship smiled at the facetiousness of his own conceit—“ and I *would* not think that he had raised his eyes and his hopes to yourself”—and here he fixed a long and scrutinizing look upon the young lady—“ there was, consequently, no other method of accounting for what I saw ; and I acted upon that very rational conclusion. I was wrong, however, my love—wrong in all my premises, save the first. Mr. Tilden has, indeed, become attached—powerfully attached—to a member of my family ; but, I fear, hopelessly.”

“ You *fear*, my lord !” exclaimed the young lady, suddenly looking up with a flash of her natural haughtiness. At that moment she entirely lost sight of the interesting and refined companion, and saw only the plebeian in her noble father’s guest.

“ I used the word advisedly, my dear Madelaine. You well know how highly I estimate our proud and ancient blood, as well as your own excelling loveliness and merit ; but I have already hinted to you, that for a time our conversation was carried on in mutual misunderstanding. I, very natu-

rally, thought only of your sister ; Mr. Tilden, full of his own feelings, thought only of yourself ; and thus we discussed the affair without either having named the person of whom he spoke, until, in allusion to the settlement which he proposed to make upon his wife, Mr. Tilden mentioned the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan. You may imagine my astonishment !”

“ And is it really possible, my lord,” asked the lady, with the pretty scorn of a spoiled beauty, “ that, having so long made the acquaintance of this proud commoner, you should have conceived it probable that he would become the husband of Lady Flora ?”

“ I did, indeed, commit that extravagance ;” said the Earl, somewhat offended by the tone in which the question was put ; “ nor do I consider it so extreme as it may appear to yourself. Mr. Tilden is no longer a boy, therefore the age of your sister was by no means a fair objection. In other respects, the one precisely possesses what the other needs ; for Tilden requires only connection to command every good which this world can offer.”

“ You would not include the Macspleuchan physiognomy in this list of advantages, I trust, my dear father ;” laughed the lady ; “ I thought that you ‘ had suffered persecution, and learnt mercy ! ’ ”

The Earl could not resist the contagion of her saucy mirth : he smiled without any symptom of displeasure ; and the more cordially that his lovely daughter appeared by no means so much shocked at the presumption of my father as he had anticipated.

“ Imagine my delight,” he pursued after a momentary pause, “ when I heard, as I supposed, a settlement of ten thousand pounds a-year made upon Lady Flora—”

“ I can well understand it,” said the beauty quietly.

“ Ten thousand a-year,” repeated his lordship complacently, “ upon a wife whose entire fortune consists of precisely half that amount. Nor, evidently, was this all which Mr. Tilden was about to propose, when, in my astonishment at his mention of your own name, I interrupted him. The offer was certainly most princely.”

He paused, not altogether certain how far he might proceed with safety upon this new tack—but he paused in vain ; for Lady Madelaine appeared resolved not to come “ to the rescue.” Why was she thus silent ? We can only say, with the German proverb, *Das Herz lügt nicht*.

“ What a splendid figure might be made by a woman of fashion and beauty upon an unencumbered ten thousand a-year !” once more declaimed his

lordship ; “ I must again repeat that the offer was princely.”

“ And intended for myself, if I have understood you rightly, my lord,” said Lady Madelaine. “ It almost makes me smile, when I remember the marvellous projects of my poor aunt in my favour, that the first suitor who has seriously pretended to my hand should be a commoner, and one, moreover, who has been contaminated by commerce ; and that I should say—knowing myself as I do—that I pray you not to precipitate this matter. Of course Mr. Tilden leaves the Castle at once.”

“ Such was his intention ;” said the Earl, who could scarcely conceal his astonishment at the words and bearing of his daughter ; “ but, in compliance with my request, he has consented to remain for a couple of days longer.”

“ With any hope of succeeding in his suit ?” asked the lady with a very peculiar expression.

“ Without the slightest,” replied the Earl ; “ and very reluctantly ; but I asked it as a favour, to prevent the possibility of remark among the household.”

“ You have acted wisely, my dear father, as you ever do :” said Lady Madelaine ; and she removed the spaniel from her lap, and drew her chair directly opposite to that of the Earl, sweeping away as she did so the piles of papers which occupied the table

before her ; and then she leant her head upon her hand for a time, in an attitude of grave thought: “ That I was not quite unprepared for this event,” she said at length after a considerable pause, upon which his bewildered lordship did not attempt to break, “ I will at once concede. I could not mistake the manner of Mr. Tilden, guarded as it has been ; nor was I blind to the fact that I am not altogether calculated to play respectably the *rôle* of a nonentity with which your lordship had favoured me in this domestic drama. Lady Flora has been *de tiers*, and not myself. So much for the state of things at home ; and now, I will give you a slight sketch of the reasons which have induced me to tolerate the proposal of Mr. Tilden.”

As she ceased speaking, she glanced towards the Earl, who replied only by a silent inclination of the head.—“ I know that I am handsome—all the world have so decided, and all the world must be right. I know that my family, on both sides, is unexceptionable, and in antiquity would do no dishonour to a German court ; and I am assuredly not of a temperament to consider such advantages as a matter of indifference. But these are not the only truths which the world has taught me. I am young in years, but old in experience. The tuition of Lady Sinclair was able, and I have learnt somewhat of myself. I have been flattered, *fêté*d,

and followed ; but the mention of my prospects has always hitherto sufficed to cool the passion created by my person. I am haughty and ambitious. Glenfillan is to me exile from all the haunts and habits of my early and brilliant girlhood. You have considerably warned me that I must not hope to revisit London for several years ; and I, in my turn, have asked myself what, under existing circumstances, I can hope from another season, when I am crippled in my resources, and have lost my affectionate and skilful chaperone. And now I have perhaps, my lord, said enough to justify my present apparently capricious conduct with regard to Mr. Tilden."

" I have listened with as much admiration as surprise ;" exclaimed the Earl. " I had fallen into a somewhat similar train of reasoning while awaiting you. But remember, my dear child, that you are still very young, and that you are very beautiful. I will be as frank as yourself, and at once admit that this marriage appears to me to be singularly desirable. Reflect, nevertheless. You have great advantages on your side—youth, beauty, and patrician birth. You are doing great honour to Mr. Tilden, even by this deliberate consideration of his proposal."

" I am not insensible to the fact, my lord ; nor, I have reason to believe, will he be so. I do not profess to love Mr. Tilden. The thing is impossi-

ble under the circumstances ; but I respect his intellect, and admire his person. He is, in short, perfectly presentable ; and, when you have ascertained that his fortune is as it has been represented to you by others, I will engage to permit his addresses ;—and the rather,” added her ladyship, with a little of the sententiousness of her father, “ that, as you did me the honour to confide to me, you are at present under some pecuniary engagement to the gentleman.”

As she ceased speaking, she rose, and having bent her head gracefully to the Earl, glided out of the room.

And thus it came to pass, gentle reader, that at the end of three months my father became the delighted husband of the lovely, the young, the highborn Lady Madelaine ; the brilliancy of whose presentation at court during the ensuing season was the theme of universal comment and envy.

Lady Madelaine Tilden’s jewels, Lady Madelaine Tilden’s equipages, and town house, her beauty, her rank, and her perfect high-breeding, were the “ lion” of the day ; and when, at the close of the spring, she retired with her husband to a magnificent estate in the west of England, situated within six miles of the county town, and in the very centre of a fastidious and aristocratic neighbourhood ; (a purchase made by my father from a bankrupt duke,) she carried away with

her the hearts of all the men, and the hatred of half the women. She felt that she had not lived in vain !

And what of Lady Flora ?

Little, and yet much. Her sister's parting present was the bequest of Lady Sinclair to herself. Lady Flora was a sort of heiress at Glenfillan, and a match for a laird ! She wept over her disappointment, but she did not break her heart ; she only sat still closer to her worstedwork, and executed with great rapidity and precision a series of blue parrots, geranium-coloured ladies, and knights in armour, with pea-green gauntlets, and swords somewhat taller than themselves.

Miss Margery was furious. Even the annuity did not console her ; and she became so garrulous and vehement in her displeasure, that the Earl found it necessary to despatch from his study to her apartment a very concise and lordly letter, sealed with his seal of office ; when the missive so ably performed its duty that the thunders of Miss Margery's wrath suddenly died away in low growls of ill-suppressed indignation.

And what of my Lord Glenfillan himself ?

Like his daughter, he felt all the mortification of Mr. Tilden's plebeianility ; but like her, he had also very readily *mit le chat en poche*, and satisfied himself that she was not altogether to be pitied. His own

little money matters were arranged with his son-in-law by a cordial shake of the hand ; and when, as he lounged in his dressing-gown and slippers in his study with the " Morning Post " in his hand, he read, with sparkling eyes and gratified pride, of all his fair and wealthy daughter's triumphs, he was much in the same mood of mind as he who sang on a somewhat similar occasion :

" 'Tis a very fine thing to be father-in-law
To a very magnificent three-tailed bashaw."

CHAPTER VI.

The newly-married couple had, as I have already stated, at the close of the London season, repaired to the west of England, to take possession of their new estate; whither they were to be followed in August by a numerous party of sporting men and pretty women. It had been my father's first earnest request to his beautiful young bride that they should proceed there alone. It was his only rational prospect of a quiet month with the fair creature whom he now called his wife; and she conceded the point, although with considerable reluctance. She remembered Glenfillan, and considered that she had already sacrificed sufficiently to duty in that way. Moreover, Sir James Dorn-ton was the best riding companion in the world, and Mr. De Clifford was to teach her billiards, and she wanted the second of Lord Otterford in her new duets; and it was very vexatious to suffer dictation on the subject of filling her own house; but, as

she was not yet the wife of a year, she determined to yield ; and having come to this virtuous resolution, she was too highbred, and too conscious of what was due to her own dignity, to do so sullenly, and like a pouting school-miss. She only asked herself, with something like a shudder, how long the month was likely to endure, which she was destined to pass in solitude with Mr. Tilden !

As for my father, he was still deeply and passionately in love with his young bride. He would not believe that either pride or indifference was the root of the unswerving coldness, the calm, fashionable placidity, with which she met all the ardour of his generous and self-abnegating affection. No, no. Since their marriage, they had been in one constant whirl of dissipation and frivolity. Her heart had not had time to speak—poor, self-deluding reasoner ! as though the heart were not independent of all such secondary influences. They were not yet thoroughly acquainted. He had not hitherto been essential to her happiness. When they were left for awhile alone, among the lawns and glades of Rooksley, nature would speak out in tenderness, and they should become everything to each other.

A wit, celebrated during the Regency, amused himself by advising the newly-married to beware of exhausting all their stock of heart-enthusiasm

during the solitude of the honeymoon, and to avoid the peril of the

“ Long probationary week
Of close retirement, as profound
As if they both were underground ;”

warning them of the consequences likely to accrue from entire and uninterrupted mutual dependence.

“ Be counselled.—Stir not, near or far,
But stay, I charge you, where you are.
The dream of passion, soon or late,
Is broken—don’t anticipate.
Haste not to lose your hopes in fears,
Stark mad for moments, dull for years;
Devour not, for your comfort’s sake,
At once, like children, all your cake;
Truth (on your memory well engrave it)
Whispers, you cannot eat and have it.
Gold is too precious—lay it not
So thickly on a single spot;
But beat the bullion—husbands, wives—
And spread it over all your lives.”

My mother’s worldly sense had been prophetic of this counsel. Married quietly and unostentatiously at Glenfillan—for, as both she and the Earl agreed, the less parade made on the occasion of becoming the wife of a commoner, the better—it was not for *them* to seem to invite congratulations—the journey to town had occupied a sufficient space of time to enable Lady Madelaine to announce herself at once to the gay world, and to rally around her all

the hundred and one friends whom she had left, grief-stricken, when she was last compelled to abandon "London and its dear delights." The anticipation of coming pleasures—the foretaste of anticipated triumphs—the newly-insured possession of affluence and independence—all conduced to make the mood of the lovely bride sunny and sweet as the most exacting bridegroom could desire ; while the pleasant languor arising from a long journey so luxuriously and deliberately performed as to make fatigue impossible, rendered the anxious and tender attentions of the newly-made husband alike well-timed and welcome ; and they were consequently so gracefully and graciously received that my father was enraptured with the brightness of his destiny.

From the hour in which they reached town, all was changed. The splendidly-mounted mansion, which had been carefully prepared for the occupation of its young mistress, startled her into an exclamation of delighted acknowledgment. Her boudoir, lined with plate-glass, and draperied with pale, blue silk ; her toilette, covered with costly toys ; her morning-room where pictures by the old masters were panelled into walls hung with crimson velvet, and exquisite *statuettes*, mounted on pedestals of *ormolu*, filled up the niches ; the spacious reception-rooms over whose arrangement the hand of wealth and elegance had successfully

resided : all these flattered the pride and satisfied the ambition of the Earl's daughter. The better feelings of her nature were awakened by the effort, everywhere visible, which had been made to gratify her peculiar tastes and wishes ; and the first evening "at home" was spent *tête-à-tête* by my father and his patrician bride in harmony and happiness.

There was so much to examine—so much to admire—and when, on touching the spring of a casket which stood upon her toilette, as the lid flew open, my mother discovered a set of diamonds which a monarch might have envied, she forgot her *morgue* for a moment, and gave loose to all the sincere delight inspired by the princely present.

My father was, as a matter of course, overpaid for all ; and he believed, unhappily for him, that this was but the commencement of a long life of wealth and confidence. No friendly voice had whispered in his ear that the beautiful Lady Madelaine de Senfillan had considered it necessary to apologize for her own pride for her condescension in becoming his wife ; and that his magnificence gratified her there because it tended to show her that, at whatever sacrifice of dignity, she had done right. He believed that they had met upon equal terms. The Earl was a needy man, to whom the retention of a slender portion destined to his daughter was an object of great and serious importance—he had

asked only the hand and heart, and not the portion, of that daughter. The first had been ceded to him readily and gracefully ; he had yet to learn in how far he had secured the other.

Lady Madelaine Tilden had taken her measures skilfully, and like a good tactitian. The first evening of her arrival in Grosvenor Square was the last which she was compelled to spend alone with her husband, and perhaps it was better so ; for these compulsory matrimonial duets are more frequently cases of moral *dos-à-dos* than *tête-à-tête* ; and it is difficult to decide, when this occurs, which individual of the conjugal *duo* is the best entitled to commiseration.

A woman, however pretty and graceful she may be at other times, when once she has resolved on investing her spirit in its wrapping-gown and *papilotes* ; and a man, however intellectual and fascinating in society, who determines on permitting his higher faculties to appear at home in the easy negligence of a *robe de chambre* and slippers, are each apt to appear considerably less attractive to the one looker-on, for whose peculiar benefit the scene has been got up, than may be altogether desirable. Certain it is that the system of “ hanging up the fiddle at home ” is a somewhat dangerous one for the performer, who is accustomed to “ discourse eloquent music ” elsewhere.

Here, then, was another peril from which Lady Madelaine wisely resolved to deliver herself at once. It was out of the question that she, young, handsome, highly-born, and fashionable, should hide her advantages from a world which she was so well calculated both to enjoy and to adorn, in order to shut herself up with Mr. Tilden, even in a room lined with plate-glass and draperied with pale blue silk ; and, acting upon this principle, she had been careful to apprise her friends of the probable period of her arrival in town.

The season was just commencing. The race of idleness and folly had scarcely begun. The arrival of the beautiful bride of the wealthy Mr. Tilden (the fame of whose large fortune had reached London, through the medium of the Earl, some weeks before), was an agreeable event ; and not the least pleasurable emotion which she had experienced on taking possession of her new home flushed the cheek of my mother, as she saw the table in her morning-room covered with minute notes, and upheaped with visiting tickets.

She had no sooner examined them on the morrow than she found herself in the very vortex of dissipation. Admiration in some, and curiosity in others, had combined to send "all the world" to Lady Madelaine's door, and each had some engagement in which she was included. Her eye brightened, and

her lip smiled, as she threw aside each note after a hasty perusal, until she opened one upon which she dwelt long and earnestly, with a heightened colour and a beating pulse, and which she consigned to her reticule as soon as she had, for the second time, reached its conclusion.

Here it is :—

“ Eureka ! you are really, then, once more on your way to town, *ma toute belle* ! I am enchanted and so is Sir Herbert. Of Otterford I say nothing, save that I have not been able to trust him out of my sight, since the news arrived. *Al buon intenditore, poche parole bastano* ! Can you condescend to the Opera before Easter ? I shall reserve a seat in my box for Saturday, as perhaps you may not yet be *montée* there ; at all events, let me have you the first night ! Pray make my *baisemains* to *il marito*, and say how much I regret that I cannot make room for him ; but I have been persecuted since this French *danseuse* made her appearance, about whom all the men in the world, *save one*, have gone mad ; and I have not moral courage enough to say ‘no,’ so long as I have a chair left. She goes to Milan next week, so don’t fail me for your own sake. How did you leave Lord Glenfillan ?

“ *Toute-à-vous* !

“ SYDNEY DEVEREUX.”

And this was Saturday. This was her first day under her husband's roof. For a moment she hesitated. Mr. Tilden might think it ungracious were she to leave him the first evening in a house as strange to himself as to her. He might not approve of her appearing for the first time in public under any protection but his own. But then the French dancer, whom she might never see at all, if she missed her to-night ! It was very provoking that there should be no room in the box for Mr. Tilden. To whom could Lady Devereux have promised all her ivories ? It was a strange question for my mother to ask herself, as she had been so long absent from town ; but, nevertheless, she did begin guessing who were to be the occupants of the box. No more women, she knew. Lady Devereux was far too fastidious to hold a parliament of petticoats at the King's Theatre. Sir Herbert detested all places save the pit. (There was no omnibus in my mother's time.) And the result of her self-questioning upon the subject was—Lord Otterford.

Lady Madelaine threw herself back among the satin cushions of her *bergère*, and fell into a fit of deep musing. Lord Otterford had worshipped her for a whole year. Her aunt had looked forward with confidence to their marriage. They had sung, danced, and rode together. Otterford was very handsome, with large, almond-shaped black eyes, a

well formed and prominent nose, fine teeth, and a graceful figure. Had there been any mind under the mask, he would have been eminently handsome. As it was, Otterford was only a musician and a *roué*. He had pursued the Lady Madelaine until he discovered that she was nearly penniless ; when, having bestowed upon her, in a fit of sentimental regret, the title of *la belle mal dotée*, he quietly withdrew his pretensions to her hand, and left it to be sought by others with fewer wants and more resources than himself.

Lady Madelaine felt his secession severely. It was not that she loved him, for she had at once discovered his mental deficiencies, while his moral lapses had been more than once hinted at in her presence ; but he was well-looking, fashionable, and heir to an earldom ; and she had, moreover, become accustomed to his assiduities, and conscious of his admiration. Among the defections of this nature, which we have elsewhere hinted to have been comprised in the early experiences of the flattered beauty, she had been less insensible to that of Lord Otterford than to those of many more wealthy, and, in the acceptation of the world, more eligible admirers.

The lip of Lady Madelaine curled, as, in thinking of the past, she remembered how her flatterers had likened her to a new and brilliant sun in the

hemisphere of fashion ; and how truly they had borne out their own hyperbole, by melting away like snow-wreaths under her influence, when they discovered that she had little beyond her beauty and her high birth, with which to compensate their homage ; and as the memory came back upon her, she instinctively suffered her eye to wander over the magnificent accessories of her married home. But with these reminiscences of her first triumphs came also the dangerous recollection, that Lord Otterford had been the last and the most reluctant to withdraw his pretensions, and that, in truth, his expensive habits and comparatively slender resources had left him without an alternative ; for Lady Madelaine had no conception of the beautiful self-abnegation, which will occasionally lead a man who truly loves to divest himself of his own tastes, and to “ cleanse his bosom of the perilous stuff ” which separates him from the object of his affection.

Her first impulse, after these reflections, was to show the note of Lady Devereux to her husband, and to claim, upon the score of her old attachment to her friend, his indulgence on the present occasion ; but, on recurring to the note itself, it struck her that it was not exactly calculated to afford him any particular satisfaction ; or to impress him with any great prejudice in favour of the fair writer ;

and then her two besetting sins came to her aid. Her pride told her that she owed it to herself not to appear to shrink from a meeting with her former admirer, who would be an eligible acquaintance for Mr. Tilden, and who could, of course, never again be more to herself: while her haughtiness reminded her that it was unworthy of Lady Madeline Glenfillan to suffer herself to be trammelled in her social arrangements by any one, simply because that "any one" had been honoured by her hand.

Just as she had arrived at this conclusion, a curricie drove to the door, and a footman shortly afterwards put a card into her hand, with an intimation that Lord Otterford was at the door, but would not intrude upon her at so unseemly an hour; having merely called at the desire of his cousin, Lady Devereux, to request a verbal reply to the note which had been left some days previously, in order to save her ladyship the trouble of a written answer so immediately upon her arrival. My mother hesitated for an instant—the position was sufficiently perplexing—but, in the next, an affirmative reply was given, and the well-appointed curricie drove off.

The rubicon was passed. At whatever cost of annoyance to her husband, the engagement must be kept; and the haughty lady practised her first

much *insouciance* as she could command ; dwelling principally upon the French dancer, and the regret of Lady Devereux that, *on this occasion*, she was unable to offer Mr. Tilden a seat in her box ; and winding up her communication by entreating, with the sweetest smile in the world, that he would not trouble himself to dress, as she had not a moment to spare, and would therefore, for her own sake, overlook the solecism.

The astonishment with which my father listened requires no comment. He was stung to the very soul ; and had Lady Madelaine raised her eyes to his countenance as he left the room, she would have been at no loss to understand the effect which her words had produced ; but she was already too good a tactitian to expose herself to unnecessary annoyance, and she consequently kept them riveted upon her bracelet.

My father was no longer a young man, and he loved for the first time. It is, therefore, scarcely to be wondered at, that before he descended from his dressing closet, after a hasty and imperfect toilette, to conduct his bride to the dining-room, he had found what he endeavoured to believe were very sufficient excuses for her thoughtlessness. She was so young, and so admired—here he involuntarily winced a little, but soon recovered himself. She had been so isolated at Glenfillan ; and

now she was again among the friends of her early youth, and the scenes of her first girlish happiness : such a circumstance would not, in all probability, occur again. She had been taken by surprise, and could not properly be blamed for wanting the consideration which a married woman, considerably her senior, had not deemed it necessary to display towards himself. Still, it *was* provoking ; and when he had fancied, too, that the becoming and careful toilette had been made for him !

There was, however, no possibility of showing even the shadow of harshness to so beautiful a being — the bride of two weeks only — and so — most gracious reader ! my father re-entered the drawing-room, in which he was to spend his solitary evening, with a smile upon his lips, and thus taught his fair wife a lesson on her own power, which she never afterwards unlearned ; and, at the close of a constrained and hurried dinner, handed her carefully to her carriage, to feel, as she drove towards the Haymarket, that, after all, Mr. Tilden was really less unreasonable than many men whom she had known ; and to wonder whether Lord Otterford would be glad to meet her again.

She was not long left in suspense ; for, as her carriage stopped at the Opera House, the subject of her thoughts stood at the portal, ready to assist her to alight, and to conduct her to Lady Deve-

reux's box. She at once saw, however, that he was no longer the laughing, joyous rattle, from whom she had parted a few months before. There was a tremour in his voice as he addressed her; an unsteadiness in the arm which he intended for her support; an evident effort in the cold and brief congratulations which he terminated with a smothered sigh, as though their utterance had cost him a pang; and his manner was altogether so contagious, that Lady Madelaine felt confused and uncomfortable in her turn; and was glad to find herself in the box of her friend, as though the presence of a third person were necessary to restore her self-possession and composure.

As the carriage drove off, my father lighted a cigar, and strolled into the square; and, when he was weary of this amusement, he returned to his splendid home. The two footmen who had attended "my lady" were already in the hall, and he knew that she had arrived safely at her destination. When he reached the drawing-room, he took up a book, but he could not read. Disguise it as he would from himself, he was wounded to the heart. He knew nothing of Lord Otterford—how should he? but he could not avoid feeling that he had been treated, if not exactly with contempt by his wife, at least with a want of courtesy imminently galling to a proud spirit like his. In short, his reverie

was any thing but pleasant ; and he was glad when, at midnight, he heard the carriage once more drive from the door to fetch home his truant wife.

On this occasion he, for the first time, paid the penalty of his wealth ; for his establishment was formed on so extensive a scale, that it was impossible for him to relieve the tedium of his solitude by making one affectionate arrangement to welcome her return. There was nothing which he could do that would not be tenfold better done by her maid or her footman ; so he amused himself by walking up and down the spacious apartment, and accommodating his paces to the pattern of the carpet, in order that, at least, he might not appear weary when she came in.

But amusements, even as intellectual as that which he had selected, will not interest for ever ; and my father had omitted to remember, that the departure of a carriage did not necessarily involve the return of its mistress ; and so it proved in this case ; for Lady Devereux had a *petit souper* after the Opera, and she declared, and Lord Otterford *looked*, the impossibility of consuming chickens and champagne without their long-lost friend ; while Lady Madelaine was so delighted with the admiration which she had elicited “ from all parts of the house,” and was so bewildered by the strange and

unaccountable melancholy of the once gay and brilliant man who had stood throughout the evening behind her chair, taking no share in the lively conversation of his cousin, but assiduous in his silent attentions to herself, that she could not forbear a feeling of curiosity as to its cause ; so she resolved to join the supper, and to take an opportunity of questioning Lady Devereux upon the subject.

There is assuredly a spell in those Opera suppers ; and this particular one was enchanting ! As she left the house, Lady Devereux was besieged by entreaties for permission to accompany her home, but, having formed her party, she was obdurate. “ Not to-night, my lord—not to-night, my dear sir.—Impossible, Sir James ; I never exceed a dozen ”—formed the running accompaniment to her retreat ; and, when Lady Madelaine drove off in her friend’s chariot, her own was ordered to follow her to Portland Place.

Half-past two o’clock on Sunday morning had chimed, when once more the knocker of the hall door sent its *stoccato* thunder through the house ; but, loud and prolonged as it was, it failed to awaken my father, who, worn out with watching, had, an hour previously, flung himself upon a sofa, and fallen into a deep sleep.

Lady Madelaine, pale and exhausted, hurried to

her dressing-room, and, having urged her Abigail to expedition, soon was, or seemed to be, buried in as profound a slumber as that which had overtaken her husband.—

And so ended their second night in town.

CHAPTER VII.

The last ball had been given ; the last dinner eaten ; the last lounge had departed, or, *faute de mieux*, had declared himself gone, and become temporarily invisible ; the belle of five seasons had reluctantly admitted to herself, and been reminded by her chaperone, that another chance was lost, and had despairingly betaken herself to a cheap watering-place, to recruit alike her health and her finances, and to sigh over the past ; the last benefit was over ; the drive was dusty and deserted ; a few who had announced that they were “ off to the continent ” had been compelled to content themselves with crossing the water in the neighbourhood of the Borough ; pedestrians could venture upon passing from the pavement of one great thoroughfare to another, without risking their necks ; tradesmen began to reckon up their profits, and fathers of families to reflect upon their bills ; in short, “ London itself was out of town,” and

still my mother lingered. Rooksley, and a matrimonial *tête-à-tête* of a month's duration, were more than she had courage to contemplate, after the brilliant and triumphant *début* which she had made. There was, however, no alternative. The season was at an end. Lady Madelaine Tilden had been the fashion. Royalty had eulogized her beauty and her grace; diners-out had decided on the excellence of her *chéf*; sour dowagers had sneered at her *mésalliance*; and budding beauties had intrigued and entreated for invitations to her ball; where

“——‘Wreathed smiles’ went round, and speeches
Fine, forced, and plentiful—as peaches;
And costly wines on every side
Poured their bright current far and wide.”

And what *rôle*, it may be asked, did my father enact in this brilliant drama. I am proud to answer, that it was one so dignified and irreproachable, that Lady Madelaine herself, had she had time to remark it, must have felt how greatly her own consequence was enhanced by the noble bearing of her husband. They were occasionally seen together in public; especially at the Opera, where she had secured a box next to that of Lady Devereux; and, on these occasions, the manly beauty and graceful bearing of Mr. Tilden never failed to elicit both comment and curiosity. Who was he?

Where did his money come from? These were the two principal queries; and, although they were frequently answered, it was always by inference or surmise; for the "set" into which his marriage had introduced him, were as little likely to know anything of the late firm of Osbaldiston and Co., as of the leading tea-mart at Peking. That he was a man of refined tastes and fastidious habits was visible at once — there was nothing of the *parvenu* about him. Half a dozen titled acquaintance volunteered to propose him at their respective clubs; a few accommodating friends were anxious to transfer to him some of the best horses in England; but they quickly discovered that Mr. Tilden knew as much of horse-flesh as themselves, although he might not condescend to make his talent quite so profitable; and, in short, it was soon evident to every body who was any body, and these composed Lady Madelaine's visiting list, that Mr. Tilden, be he whom he might, was not a man who could either be "shelved" or "done."

And now, a circumstance has just struck me, which from my own knowledge of the veracity of my narrative, never before presented itself to my mind; but which may very fairly have induced some doubt in those of such of my readers as may feel disposed to be difficult and hypercritical.

I have made repeated allusions to the refined

mind and elegant tastes of my father, and there may be individuals, who, themselves highly-born and elaborately educated, may revert to the early training and occupation of the young merchant with a feeling of fastidiousness and contempt ; and please themselves by believing in the impossibility of so utter a change as that which I have represented, and in comparatively so short a space of time. They have only, however, to remember that *human will* is a most powerful engine ; and that where it was worked by ambition, pride, and self-respect, it was urged on by three of the great impulses of our nature. Nor was the social conversion of my father a sudden miracle, wrought by the mere possession of wealth ; it was the slowly and steadily attained result of time, and distance, and application. I have myself not spared the satisfied ignorance of the travelled novice, who, anxious to assume the attributes of a connoisseur, dabbled in doubtful originals, and consigned to the address of his agent in England a case or two of worthless pictures : but those follies were the early mistakes of his inexperience, by which he had far too much good sense and discrimination to be long misled. A total estrangement from the scenes, the associates, and the pursuits of his early manhood, threw the active mind of my father upon the individuals and habits of those by whom he was surrounded ; and

the same steady and strong will which had initiated him into the complicated mysteries of commerce, soon provided him with an *open sesame* to the more easily-attained conventionalisms of general society. Wherever he paused during his travels, he applied himself strenuously to the examination and comprehension of all that fell under his notice ; while he was careful to select his casual society among that description of persons with whom he was desirous thenceforth to associate on equal terms. His evident wealth and total want of pretension rendered this by no means so difficult a matter as at first sight it may appear. Long voyages at sea, in the infancy of steam, and the generalizing accommodations of foreign posting-houses, were able aids to his design. But who that has travelled, even of late years, has not experienced the truth which I am here endeavouring to enforce ? Suffice it that my father did succeed to the full extent of his wishes ; and that at the period of his marriage with Lady Madelaine Glenfillan he was at once a finished gentleman and a complete man of the world ; and perhaps he had the more readily adopted the tastes and usages of the noble and the wealthy, because in the outset of his career of ambition *he had nothing to undo*.

It is only those who have trammelled themselves with low-bred associates, and degraded their own

minds by low-bred habits, who cannot rise with their fortunes ; and this is a fact which the narrow-minded insolence of the " exclusive " would do well to learn, instead of affecting to believe that his " order " came into the world after " every god had set his seal " upon it, while all other classes of society were branded with the mark of Cain.

To this, my reader's first possible objection, not only to the positive veracity but even to the verisimilitude of my family sketch, he may also advance the improbability of the decision and the world-wisdom of which I have shown my mother to be possessed at so early an age as nineteen ; but, should he indeed do so, he can know little of woman's nature. With women, I do not hesitate to affirm that intellect, strong will, and extraordinary powers of perspicacity and *fitness*, are of no particular age. Watch an intelligent girl as she passes from childhood into youth, and my argument will be at once borne out. I am hazarding no rash opinion. The assertion is founded upon extensive experience. Generally speaking, the youth at sixteen is still a boy, absorbed by his lexicon, his boat, and his pony ; but the girl who at sixteen is not a woman alike in intellect and in *heart* bids fair to die a child or a simpleton at the close of a long life. All children, particularly those who are banished to the nursery, and consigned to the companionship of

hirelings, necessarily hear many things which they are not supposed to remark, far less to understand; but the young are peculiarly susceptible to all that is passing about them, and nothing falls to the ground unheeded which is brought under their observation.

In comparative infancy boys experience this external influence far less than their sisters. Their habits, at once boisterous and active, afford to them fewer opportunities of hearing discussions, and arguments, and inferences, relating to social ties and social usages. The sedentary amusements of girls lend themselves, on the contrary, not only to momentary attention, but to after-speculation. Jemima, as she trims her frock, is frequently employed in wondering what mamma meant last night by telling Mrs. Smith that Miss Jones had jilted Mr. Brown, because she discovered that Mr. Robinson was a richer man; and when the frock is completed a day or two afterwards, she is very probably still occupied in wondering whether, when she is a little older, she shall ever jilt any one, and if it is a pleasant amusement, and what it really means. Fanny, as she dresses her doll, bids her be good and quiet, and then she shall have a rich husband, and ride in a carriage, and *do just as she likes*; for mamma told papa yesterday, when he was angry with her, that she would do as she liked—while

dowry, she learnt that even she—the highly-born and the beautiful—could be put into a humiliating competition with—money! Then, again, her woman-wit lent its aid; and, where a weaker mind would have become bitter, she only became wise. Her after-fate confirmed this wisdom. In the seclusion of her father's castle, and rendered painfully aware of that father's trammelled position, she had time to revert to the past. She began to concede that the fortune-hunting adorers, by whom she had been first worshipped and then deserted, might advance a valid excuse for their apostacy—she began to discover that there was wisdom as well as wit in the old song, which declares that

“Not even love can live on flowers;”

and—she married my father.

Lady Madelaine Tilden had not studied for the nine long years of awakening womanhood under such able tutors as the world and Lady Sinclair; she had not suffered mortification and disappointment; she had not felt her pride prostrated, her self-love wounded, and her heart made the toy of idle and interested foplings; she had not been suddenly withdrawn from the giddy vortex of fashion and celebrity, and buried alive in the highlands, to muse over the motives, the impulses, the feelings, and the weaknesses of those

among whom she had previously lived, to re-appear in the same bright and busy world a woman in stature, but a child at heart.

Remembering my mother vividly, as I still do, I feel satisfied that, with the same experience (had that been possible), she would have played at fifteen the same cold, and haughty, and decisive part. Age has no influence upon principles, and feelings, and prejudices, like those of Lady Madelaine Tilden.

The season was at an end. The woods and glades of Rooksley were in all their beauty. The domain was extensive, and in admirable taste. If a fault could be found, it existed in the absence of all ancient timber—the leafy honours of Rooksley Chace had been stricken down by the hammer of the auctioneer. It is true, that great skill had been evinced in repairing this evil, in so far as it was susceptible of reparation ; but the antique grandeur of the mansion seemed to frown forth, in haughty scorn of the new generation of forest timber that was growing up about it.

Lady Devereux, on her first visit to the Chace, laughingly told her cousin that the new acquisition of Mr. Tilden reminded her of himself: it was very stately and very magnificent, but *it wanted time!*

“ At last, my sweet Madelaine,” said her hus-

band, as for the second time they sat *tête-à-tête* by lamplight under their own roof, "at last you are all my own, and I have time to ask you a thousand questions, which you, more strangely still, have time to answer. And, first, how do you like Rooksley?"

"It is impossible not to like a place upon which the Duke of Dorchester prided himself so much;" replied my mother, who had never been surprised out of her *nil admirari* since her arrival in Grosvenor Square; "but it sadly wants timber."

"Our woods are very promising, and we must have patience," said my father, in whose voice there was a slight tone of disappointment.

"And you must excuse me if I add, Mr. Tilden, that the house as sadly requires—inmates. We are positively lost here alone."

"But just now, my dear Madelaine, repose and quiet are so essential to you. Your roses have waned fearfully during the past season. I shall not be happy until I see them bloom again."

"Have we any neighbourhood?" asked the young wife in her turn.

"I have not yet made the inquiry. I only fear that we shall ascertain the fact too soon. In so fine a sporting country, there can be little doubt that we shall find many resident families, who will not fail to seize so admirable an opportunity of

making the acquaintance of the fair and fashionable Lady Madelaine Tilden."

"Provided that they prove visitable, it will be a blessing;" said my mother, as she suppressed a yawn; "Glenfillan has perfectly disgusted me with empty, echoing, overgrown family houses."

My father walked to the open window, and, drawing back the curtain, looked out upon the beautiful expanse of wood and water, which lay steeped in moonlight, beyond the lawn. The deer were lying in groups upon the soft greensward of the home-park, and their long shadows formed fantastic outlines upon the grass. The nightingales were answering each other from the leaf-laden boughs. At intervals a hare started from the underwood, and scudded across the open glades, brushing away the heavy drops of dew which fringed the blades of the long grass; and the peculiar cry of the pheasants broke the silence for an instant, as it rose from the more distant preserves.

It was a scene of rich and tranquil English landscape beauty; and as my father mentally ran over the various and vaunted spots which he had visited during his wanderings, he could recall nothing by which it seemed to him to be rivalled in pure and placid loveliness.

After having contemplated the enchanting view for a time in silence, he could not refrain from ex-

patiating upon its extreme beauty to Lady Madeleine, who rose languidly from her chair, as if rather with a courteous desire to give him pleasure, than from an idea of receiving any herself. My mother was no whit a sentimentalist: she had never been taught to consider the country otherwise than as the most correct refuge after the season, and that portion of the British empire in which the flowers were grown that composed her bouquets. But even she was not altogether proof against the spell of the quiet holiness of nature: and, for a time, she gazed long and silently on the clear glory of that summer night; watched the reflection of the bright stars, as they appeared to dance upon the undulating ripple of the lake; and then sent her long and searching glances deep into the blue and cloudless sky, over which they were strown like diamond studs upon a regal mantle; while the moon, that lay lovingly upon the open glades, and on the glittering waters, only touched the summits of the tall trees, and crowned them with silver, leaving broad masses of shadow about and beneath them, which lent a mysterious indistinctness to the distance.

Hers was not, however, a nature to remain long thus absorbed. The very beauty of the scene soon suggested other and more worldly ideas. She began to think how admirably the park lent itself to

the idea of a brilliant *fête champêtre*. Fireworks would have a delightful effect, if let off from the island on the lake. Nothing could be prettier! And two or three boats, gaily decked with streamers and coloured lights, would be fairy-like and magical, as they appeared and disappeared among the overhanging willows. Then she peopled the lawn with dancing booths, marquees, and parti-coloured groups; and then she heaved a sigh, as she remembered that they were utter strangers in the county, and that, to do all this, the few friends whom they expected would not suffice; while even, for the advent of those few, she had yet a weary month to wait.

“Is it not calm and lovely?” asked my father at length, as with affectionate anxiety he threw a shawl over her shoulders, and passed his arm about her waist. “The long, deep sigh, to which you just now gave utterance, awoke me, my sweet wife, from the most delicious train of thought in which I had ever indulged. Dare I tell you what was its subject?”

“As it would seem that we were similarly engaged, we have alike done treason to the beauty upon which we looked;” was the reply; “for in me, also, it induced a *château en Espagne*, that was not without its charms.”

“Will you not confide it to me?”

“ I see no reason why I should refuse. I was picturing to myself how beautiful a *fête* we might give here, and how well every thing would *tell*, for no natural accessory is wanted ; when I suddenly remembered that we knew no one, and that, consequently, I could do nothing, save console myself with the Italian proverb, *Soffri il male, e aspetta il bene.*”

“ And I,” said the husband, as he looked down fondly, and yet somewhat mournfully, upon the beautiful face, on which the moonlight shed its clear, calm radiance ; “ I was thinking with how proud a heart I might one day see you lead forth *our child* to gambol on that velvet lawn, and to sport beside those glittering waters. I was thinking —”

“ I beseech you, do not read me a homily ;” said my mother, withdrawing herself from his clasp with a slight shudder, and returning to her seat : “ that is a subject which I by no means wish to dwell on. I assure you, Mr. Tilden, that to a young and fashionable woman such a prospect is by no means a pleasant one.”

“ But to a wife, Madelaine—”

“ Ha, that is the text of another homily. Fifteen years hence I shall myself, perhaps, babble of maternal duties ; at present I do not affect to understand them, and am only thankful that, at all

events, such things have been created as nursery-maids and governesses."

"One day I trust that you will feel differently," said my father, forcing a smile.

"Perhaps;" was the cold reply; "but at present I will only ask you to ring for the chess-board."

CHAPTER VIII.

The dreaded month went by more rapidly than the Lady Madelaine had anticipated. It was impossible to be thrown entirely upon my father's society without appreciating his many admirable qualities; and, had not the twelve previous weeks of dissipation, coquetry, and folly, thoroughly unhinged the mind, and perverted the feelings of the young wife, she might possibly have learnt to love her husband as he deserved. But, alas! those twelve short weeks had been sufficient to destroy this hope for ever.

Let it not be thought that my mother wilfully, and with her eyes open, plunged herself into positions of difficulty, and resolved to indulge her own predilections *coute qui coute*. Far from it. Had she imagined that Lord Otterford was a deliberate and cold-blooded profligate, who was amusing himself at the expense of her vanity and inexperience, she would have shrunk from him with horror. It was that very vanity and inexperience which

blinded her. Had she gone a step further, and suspected that he had yet darker and more guilty designs, she would, in all probability, have sought for protection and refuge in the affection of the man to whom she had given her hand ; but no such idea ever crossed the pure mind of Lady Madelaine. She was vain, imprudent, and exacting. She required homage, but she never dreamt of paying it by a return. The haughtiness of her natural disposition made her jealous of all interference on the part of her husband ; and the line of conduct which she had adopted immediately after her marriage had so thoroughly emancipated her from his control, that she soon ceased to understand that he had any right to exert it. It was true—as her friend Lady Devereux had sententially observed, in one of those hours of female confidence which are productive, at times, of a vast amount of evil—that Mr. Tilden had rescued her from the monotonous exile of Glenfillan, and surrounded her with magnificence ; but what had *she* not done for *him* ? Look at her rank—her connection—her beauty ! Was he not almost old enough to be her father ? And—her dear Madelaine must forgive her for speaking frankly—was he not, before their marriage, a nobody ?

All this was undeniable—and upon these premises my mother acted. There can be no doubt

that there must have been moments in which the question *would* arise in her own heart, in how far her renewal of intimacy with Lord Otterford was either desirable or correct ; but, if it were so, the extreme pride, which was her besetting sin, must equally in those moments have proved her worst enemy, by blinding her to the danger she had so thoughtlessly evoked.

Be all this, however, as it may, the month of matrimonial domestication wore away swiftly ; the neighbourhood proving not only visitable but sociable. My father's surmise was a correct one. The fame of the dashing Lady Madelaine Tilden had preceded her, and all the county were anxious to be numbered among her acquaintance. The men were prepared to lose their hearts, and the women to profit by so admirable an opportunity of imitating the dress and style of a celebrated beauty. It is true, that the extremely cold and sometimes arrogant bearing of my mother, led a few of the most important families to doubt whether, after all, the long-talked-of Tildens would prove any very great acquisition ; and to contrast the haughty and indolent courtesies of their new neighbour with the easy and winning manners of the Ladies Trevor ; but, as the frank politeness of my father offered an agreeable relief from the supercilious *insouciance* of his wife, and invariably healed the wounds which

her indifference had inflicted on the self-love of their visitors, no decided affront was given to the female portion of the guests ; while the extreme beauty and inherent love of admiration which made my mother so attractive to the other sex, sufficiently propitiated their husbands and brothers, to induce them to believe and to declare that Lady Madelaine Tilden was an angel !

As a matter of course, invitations poured in at Rooksley ; and among the rest, came one from the Vernons, whose estate joined that of my father. Mrs. Vernon was a widow, whose husband had represented the county in parliament ; and who, although he had been dead for several years, had never quite recovered her loss. She was a gentle, amiable woman, still possessing the remains of great beauty, but thoroughly indifferent to everything, save the happiness of her son and daughter, at whose entreaty she had emerged from retirement, to make the acquaintance of the new owners of Rooksley.

Frederic Vernon was a fine young man of six-and-twenty, with a full appreciation of his personal and worldly advantages ; which latter attribute I mention rather to give a proof of his consistency, than from conceiving it to be an extraordinary feature of his history which required to be put on record. He had recently returned from a tour of Europe, and was strongly tinged with

foreign habits and ideas. To him the sojourn of Vernon Priory, beautiful as it was, would have been insupportable, had not the extreme affection which he bore to his mother and sister made every spot which they inhabited not only bearable, but pleasant to him. Frederic Vernon was not constituted for retirement. His talents were dazzling, but by no means solid ; his acquirements were barely respectable ; but he had the tact to appear far wiser than he was—a secret more generally diffused in society than it is supposed to be, and particularly easy to practice by a handsome young man of good property, whom no one is vastly disposed to criticize with severity. His success abroad had been considerable ; and it was even rumoured that he had been requested to quit the territories of a petty Italian *Duca* within twenty-four hours, although it had never occurred to Mr. Vernon to have any political opinion out of his own country ; but he *had* danced, and sighed, and looked love-lorn, in a quarter where such proceedings were not admissible ; and he accordingly obeyed without demur the obliging suggestion of the official who waited upon him at his hotel ; and passed out of the Duchy on the following morning, carrying away with him a heavy heart and an exceedingly magnificent brilliant ring.

No one could exactly decide how this travelling

adventure became whispered in England, as his valet was, of course, as secret as the grave; and the affair was altogether too delicate to have borne mention from himself; but, nevertheless, it *was* whispered; and it is, therefore, not surprising that Mr. Frederic Vernon was considered, and considered himself to be, the hero of the county. He had fits of abstraction—in society; occasionally started painfully as his eye fell upon the ring; sung one particular and pathetic Italian ballad with peculiar pathos and expression to his guitar; and was, in short, a drawing-room Corydon.

Emily Vernon was a charming girl of eighteen. Tall, and fair, and gentle; tenderly attached to her widowed mother, and devotedly fond of her handsome and sentimental brother; without one thought of self, or one craving for admiration.

Mr. Tilden had been from home when the Vernons called, and my mother had returned the visit without him, by leaving cards at their lodge-gate during her drive; nor had she considered it necessary to mention the circumstance, until the arrival of the dinner-card; when she carelessly inquired of my father if he considered it expedient to accept the invitation.

“Since you request my opinion, I should say decidedly yes;” was the reply. “On passing their place, a day or two since, I inquired to whom it belonged, and was informed that the late pro-

prietor represented the county during several sessions, and that the ladies of the family were almost domesticated at Rooksley, with the daughters of the Duke !”

“ And Félicie tells me,” followed up my mother, “ that Mrs Vernon’s son, who is now at the Priory, is a sort of *hero de roman*, who eloped with an Italian Principessa, fought a duel with the Prince, and was expelled the country by the Pope himself—a *personage*, in short, who is contraband over half Europe.”

“ Ha, indeed ! Is it so ? Am I fated to find my old travelling comrade, Frederic Vernon, in my nearest neighbour ?” said my father with a smile. “ The name was not sufficiently uncommon to strike me ; but the affair with the Italian *Duchessa* settles the point.”

“ And was he really involved in a duel, and afterwards expelled the country ?” asked my mother, roused for a moment into a feeling of interest.

“ So it was said ; and it is certain that his disappearance from the Duchy was so sudden that he did not favour his friends by any leave-taking. There was decidedly some mystery attached to him ; but as we never afterwards chanced to meet, I am unable to afford any precise information on the subject.”

“ We will dine with the Vernons, at all events,”

said the bride ; “ I will cancel my acceptance to Lady O’Halloran ; the Hall is at least four miles from hence ; and the Vernons live nearly at the Park Gate ; the fatigue will be much lessened by the change.”

And having so decided, my mother once more bent her fair head over her desk ; gave the note which she had already written to Lady O’Halloran to her spaniel for a plaything ; wrote an acceptance to Mrs. Vernon with her best crowquill ; and then threw herself back among her cushions, to wonder what effect her own beauty would produce upon a man who had been expelled from an Italian Duchy, to save the honour of its female sovereign.

For the first time since her arrival in the country, Lady Madelaine took considerable interest in the operations of Félicie, on the evening of Mrs. Vernon’s dinner. She resolutely resisted all the endeavours of her attendant to induce her to make her *débüt* in the county *en grande dame* ; refused to wear any ornament ; and, notwithstanding the voluble horror and visible mortification of the *soubrette*, declared her intention of eschewing all *coiffure* save her own magnificent hair. Félicie urged, entreated, and eventually wept over the extraordinary resolution of her mistress ; and closed drawers and caskets with a series of gestures of offended dignity which were quite indescribable ;

although she afterwards conceded to Mrs. Lockall, the housekeeper, that it was a comfort to know, in spite of the *caprice* which induced *Milady* to go out for the first time in a costume better suited to a *petite fille*, than to the wife of a *millionaire*, that she had seldom seen her look so well; and therefore, it was easy to imagine how she *would* have looked had she been *mise comme-il faut*!

It was, however, as I need scarcely explain, no part of Lady Madelaine's system to owe admiration to a ribbon or a set of baubles. If she could not command it by the graces of her person, she scorned to win it by the magnificence of her attire; or to share it with diamonds and gauzes. That she had judged wisely, in the present instance, she at once perceived by the expression of her husband's countenance, as she joined him in the library, previous to their departure for Vernon Priory. She had indeed, as Félicie wisely remarked, seldom looked so beautiful. There was an utter absence of pretension in her whole appearance; a dignified simplicity in her dress and bearing, which delighted my father. She had evidently no intention of overawing her new acquaintance by the power of her wealth—that most undertoned of all ambition—and her extreme loveliness was so conspicuous in the utter absence of extraneous ornament, that, as he raised her hand to his lips, he could not resist

the utterance of a compliment more lover-like than matrimonial.

Five minutes' drive from their own Park Gate brought them to that of Mrs. Vernon ; and even in the twilight my father could not forbear remarking the magnificence of the old avenue through which they approached the house, which was surrounded on all sides by elms and beeches of stately growth. The building itself appeared to be coeval with the timber. A great portion of the exterior was overgrown with ivy, amid which the lofty lancet-headed windows, streaming with light, produced at that hour a magical effect ; while the deep perspective of the principal entrance, whose receding arches were terminated by massive doors of iron-studded oak, gave an antique stateliness to the edifice, and heightened its monastic character.

Considerably less extensive than Rooksley, Vernon Priory was infinitely more attractive to a stranger. No woodman's axe had ever sounded in that quiet spot. It was easy to see that sire and son had alike respected the place of their birth, and the home of their ancestors. When a giant tree lay prone within the limits of the moss-grown fences, it was because time had eaten away its stout heart, and relaxed its weakened roots ; and while the scattered rooks cawed their hoarse requiem over the prostrate ruin, it conveyed no reproach to the

lords of the soil. No croupier's rake had ever swept away the leafy honours of the Vernon woods; no dice-box had ever rattled its triumph over their sturdy trunks. Like the treasure of the pre-adamite Sultans, to which travellers tell us that every monarch is compelled to add his share, while none are permitted to withdraw any portion of that already hoarded, so did every succeeding Vernon plant his saplings in the soil of his ancestors; while each would have considered it as sacrilege to destroy the work, or counteract the intention of his predecessor.

When my father and Lady Madelaine entered Mrs. Vernon's drawing-room, the party, which was by no means a large one, had already assembled; the hostess received her stranger guests with a quiet elegance of demeanour which accorded well with her stately although faded beauty, and her deep mourning dress; and after having presented her son and daughter, proceeded to introduce my mother to the lady who occupied a portion of the sofa to which she led her, while my father renewed his acquaintance with Mr. Vernon.

This lady, who chanced to be Lady O'Halloran, found an immediate topic of conversation, in her regret that Mrs. Vernon should have proved more fortunate than herself, in being the first to receive their new neighbour; and then she proceeded to

congratulate herself on having, at least, so agreeable an opportunity of making her acquaintance. Lady Madelaine bowed, and smiled, although she felt greatly disposed to yawn; but she found the volubility of her new friend less importunate when she discovered that there was no necessity for her to offer any reply; so she continued to bow and smile at intervals during the five minutes which preceded dinner; and she had scarcely left her seat, and taken the arm of Mr. Vernon on its announcement, ere Lady O'Halloran assured Dr. James the rector, under whose escort she was preparing to follow, that Lady Madelaine Tilden had been cruelly misrepresented by her correspondent Mrs. Gordon, for that she had seldom met with a more simply-mannered or sensible person. The worthy gentlewoman was not aware, or had forgotten that "the beard does not make the philosopher;" and that it was very possible for a fashionable beauty to be all that she had heard, when she felt it expedient to assert herself; and yet patiently to suffer the garrulous civility of an elderly gentlewoman where she was anxious to disarm local criticism.

Lady O'Halloran was, accordingly, by no means the only person whose golden opinion my mother won that evening. Mrs. Vernon was delighted at the prospect of obtaining such a friend for her gentle Emily; who, on her part, was enchanted

with the quiet grace and highbreeding of the new mistress of Rooksley. But of all those whom she thrall'd, not one was so thoroughly the slave of her fascinations as Mr. Frederic Vernon. He assured Mrs. Alexander, who sat on his left hand, that Lady Madelaine Tilden reminded him almost painfully of a woman of high rank whom he had known abroad ; and then he sighed, and glanced down upon his brilliant ring, and fell into a fit of abstraction ; during which his dark blue eyes were riveted on the table-cloth, and he looked like one who lived rather upon the memory of the past, than the realities of the present.

When the ladies retired to the drawing-room, my mother turned the light of her most sunny smiles upon Emily Vernon. She was precisely the person calculated to please a handsome young married woman of high fashion. Strikingly pretty, and highly accomplished, she was nevertheless so gentle and so new to the world, that her attractions were veiled by her extreme timidity—she had not within her the elements of a rival ! Nothing could have been so fortunate ; and, acting upon this conviction, Lady Madelaine, instead of closing her eyes, and throwing herself upon a sofa to await the re-appearance of the gentlemen, at once entered into conversation with her young hostess ; and ere twenty minutes had elapsed, she was seated at Miss

Vernon's harp, explaining to her a difficult passage in a popular piece of music ; after which, as enthusiastically as though she had only that one delighted auditor, she swept the chords with a master hand, and electrified the assembled party by her brilliant execution ; and then, suddenly suffering the strings to vibrate into silence, once more established herself beside the astonished and delighted girl, and resumed the conversation which the music had interrupted.

“ You know Rooksley well, I understand,” she said in a subdued voice.

“ Oh, very well—too well—It was almost as much my home as this, before the Duke's”—She paused, not knowing how best to shape her meaning.

“ I understand ;” said Lady Madelaine, as she laid her own beautiful hand upon that of her companion ; “ but, Miss Vernon, you must cease to say ‘ too well,’ or I shall despair of making it again agreeable to you. Remember that you are my nearest neighbour, and that I shall depend greatly upon your kindness. Doubtlessly you had your own apartment at Rooksley ; you must come back, and take possession once more.”

Tears swelled in the mild eyes of her listener.

Mr. Tilden and I are at present *tristes comme des bonnets de nuit*, “ pursued my mother ; “ but we promise to behave better ere long. I am supposed

to be worn out by the London season, and am consequently sentenced to a month's quiet. I shall not regret it so much if you consent occasionally to share my solitude. We expect a shooting party in august, and Mr. Tilden is already full of anxiety about his preserves,—in fact, he is endeavouring to become a respectable country gentleman ; which is, I imagine, quite correct under the circumstances."

" His Grace of Dorchester was immensely popular ;" said the eldest, over-dressed, Miss Alexander, who sat near them.

My mother turned upon her a freezing look of non-recognition, and then calmly withdrew her eyes.

" You are not, I believe, Lady Madelaine Tilden, acquainted with Miss Alexander ;" said Emily Vernon, whose cheek was crimson with confusion. " Will you permit me to present her ?"

The ladies bowed ; and at the conclusion of the ceremony, my mother threw herself back upon the sofa, and made no reply to the remark of Miss Alexander, that her mother had done herself the honour of calling at Rooksley. It was no part of her system to be condescending and approachable to all the county.

The gentlemen and the coffee appeared together ; and Mrs. Vernon hastened to make known to her

new neighbours, Dr. James, the worthy rector of the parish, and chaplain to His Grace the Duke of Dorchester. Nothing could be more amiable than the reception which he met with from my mother; and Miss Alexander was once more compelled to feel how charming Lady Madelaine Tilden could make herself when she pleased, and how exceedingly ill-bred she was when she thought proper to be so. Indeed, as Dr. James afterwards remarked, the Lady Madelaine Tilden not only met him in the most charming spirit in the world, but even summoned her husband, who was at the moment in deep conversation with young Vernon, in order that he might reiterate her own friendly assurances of an universal welcome at Rooksley.

And Dr. James was quite correct in this statement. When he was led up to my mother, Miss Vernon was summoned to her harp; and, when Miss Vernon obeyed the summons, the Reverend Doctor remained standing before his fair and smiling interlocutor, until a gesture brought her husband to her side, leaving Mr. Vernon *planté* in the centre of the room; who, as a matter of course, no sooner saw the Doctor engrossed by Mr. Tilden, than he hastened to establish himself in the seat which had been vacated by his sister.

It was a feeling compounded of coquetry and curiosity, which led my mother to exert her utmost

fascinations against Mr. Vernon. She was not new enough to flattery and adulation to value them for their own sake ; but her vanity was piqued in this instance, and she was at present thrown upon every passing folly for amusement. She did not even remark (as she did subsequently) that Frederic Vernon was amazingly handsome, and that he had the sweetest voice and the whitest hand in the world ; she only thought of the *Duchessa*, and was anxious to see if, indeed, as Félicie had informed her, “ *il n'avoit plus de gout pour le sexe.*”

Need I say that she had arrived at a totally different decision before her carriage was announced ; or that, as he handed her up the steps, and saw Mr. Tilden take his place beside her, Mr. Vernon believed himself to be once more desperately in love ?

My mother left one heavy heart behind her when she quitted Vernon Priory ; and that heart beat in the bosom of Miss Caroline Alexander. She had long loved the truant knight, who had evidently become the slave of the beautiful and fashionable stranger ; while Mr. Vernon, on his side, had ever, previously to this evening, appeared more happy in her society than in that of any other marriageable young lady in the county ; and, with that unfortunate facility common to good-looking and well-dowried girls, who are frequently

thrown into the society of handsome and idle men of sentimental tendencies, she had very readily allowed herself to believe that the inclination was mutual ; an opinion strongly supported by her mother, a dashing widow, who was quite willing to see her daughters established ; and by her elder sister, who being a year or two Mr. Vernon's senior, had no designs upon him on her own account.

It will be easily understood, therefore, that the undisguised admiration of Mr. Vernon for my mother sent a pang to the heart of Caroline Alexander ; and when, on his return to the drawing-room, he proceeded at once to the instrument where his sister had again taken up her station, instead of sharing the lounge upon which she was herself seated alone, she had great difficulty in suppressing the tears which rose to her eyes. She had dreaded, during his absence from the room, that on his re-appearance she should be condemned to listen to his admiration of the new star which had risen in their hemisphere ; but she did expect that she should have been the auditor whom he would select ; and she accordingly comforted herself with the recollection that Lady Madelaine Tilden was a married woman ; very heroically compelled herself to join in the comments which were made upon her grace and beauty

directly she had taken leave ; and had also quite determined on agreeing with her recreant lover (for such she believed him to be) in every particular, however provoking his hyperbole might prove.

The unexpected movement which he had made, however, on entering the room, and his utter silence on the subject of the departed guest, counteracted all her projects ; and as she watched him, half buried in a large chair, with his eyes fixed upon the carpet, and the thick masses of his auburn hair falling partially over his face, she for the first time felt a bitter pang of jealousy and doubt. The memory of the *Duchessa* did not affect her—but the apparition of my mother rendered her wretched ; and the rather as she was compelled to acknowledge to herself that it was an effect produced without effort. Nothing could be more unpretending than Lady Madelaine's manner ; nothing more simple than her costume. What would it be should Frederic be fated to see her in all the magnificence of dress and fashion, as she had been described in Mrs. Gordon's letter to Lady O'Halloran ! Poor Caroline looked down upon her own elaborate toilette, and could have wept. It was a relief to her overcharged heart when her mother's carriage was announced, and they, in their turn, departed from the Priory, which had so long been the centre of all her hopes and of all her ambition.

Nothing could be more simple than that the Vernons, who, in addition to their near neighbourhood, claimed, through the gentlemen, a previous acquaintance, should become speedily intimate at Rooksley. The fair Emily proved an admirable *cicerone* to my mother through the mysteries and beauties of her own domain; while she soon discovered that Mr. Vernon rode as well as Sir James Dornton, and was even more careful. Under these circumstances, the time ceased to hang so heavy; indeed, when in addition to her new inmates, for such they nearly were, Lady Madeleine found herself absorbed in a never-ending round of dinner-engagements, she had no longer a moment unemployed.

My father, through the medium of Mr. Vernon, soon made acquaintance with all the gentry on his own side of the county; and was prevailed upon to make some extensive purchases in land, which brought him into close contact with the farming interest. His old habits of business enabled him to do this at less loss than generally attends upon such speculations; and he derived perpetual amusement from his schemes of improvement and amelioration. At the suggestion of Emily Vernon, my mother adopted the schools which had been established by the Ladies Trevor, under the sanction of the Duke; and spared no expense in ren-

dering them "model-schools." The children wore the prettiest of all pretty uniforms; they had a dinner in the servants' hall at Rooksley every Sunday; the teachers were amply supplied with books of every description; and, in short, the gentle Emily was rejoiced to see all the schemes carried out which had been the day-dream of her former friends. But the Ladies Trevor, nevertheless, had done for these local schools what my mother was by no means inclined to imitate: they had watched over the individual welfare and progress of their little scholars; and, through the medium of their artless communications, they had ascertained the necessities and struggles of many a deserving family, and had thus been enabled to relieve their wants with judgment as well as kindness.

Into the detail of the establishment my mother was, on the contrary, quite incompetent to enter. Her ideas of poverty did not extend beyond the deprivation of particular luxuries, or, at worst, comforts; but she liked to see the children looking pretty and well-dressed in church on the Sunday; and it was pleasant to feel that it was her own work. She really felt glad, too, when Miss Vernon suggested that the school-house, which stood on the verge of the Rooksley estate, was in a dilapidated condition; and that on driving out with her friend to look at it, she discovered that it was an unsightly

barn-like building, which had been erected with a view to do the greatest possible good at the smallest possible amount of outlay. This was a charming circumstance; and before they left the village, a cottage which chanced to be untenanted was at once secured by Lady Madelaine for the use of the children until their own school-house could be rebuilt; and, immediately on their return home, my father was commissioned to write to town for architectural drawings, from which a design might be selected to replace the present building.

No proposition could more thoroughly have delighted Mr. Tilden. He was rejoiced to see so wholesome a taste superseding the frivolous pursuits by which his beautiful wife had hitherto been totally engrossed; and, as he lost not a moment in complying with her desire, the plans soon arrived, and were at once submitted to the fair speculators.

After great deliberation, the choice of Miss Vernon was absolutely negatived. It was too small, too plain, and too insignificant. Lady Madelaine was anxious for an erection which should be at once imposing and picturesque; and, when my father smiled at her earnestness, she looked serious, and talked of improving the estate. Mr. Vernon agreed with her in every particular; and they accordingly proceeded together, and selected

a spot at the entrance of the village, where a handsome gothic edifice was soon in progress, wherein all the poor children in the county might have been commodiously lodged and taught. Such being the case, the centre was appropriated to the schools, and the wings were fitted up as almshouses; an arrangement which at once rendered Lady Madelaine popular throughout the parish. The respectable inhabitants got up an address of thanks, which was presented by Dr. James; and the sensation was so new and so delightful, that for a time my mother was engrossed by this novel occupation; but, unfortunately, just as the walls began to show themselves above the ground, Rooksley suddenly became full of guests, and the thoughts of *la dame Châtelaine* suffered a serious revulsion.

The first arrivals were Sir Herbert and Lady Devereux, who had, as her ladyship expressed it, been stupifying at their place in Kent, until the happy moment when they should fly to Rooksley. She cast a surprised and rather chilling glance upon Miss Vernon, whom she found calmly employed at her embroidery-frame in my mother's morning-room; and, the necessary introduction over, threw herself upon a sofa near her hostess, and forthwith plunged into a stream of fashionable jargon totally unintelligible to the simple-minded Emily.

“And now, *cara!*” she continued, after a momentary pause, “how have you managed to exist so long alone in the country? You really deserve to be canonized! So idolized as you are in the world, your virtue must have been Spartan to bear you up. I am well aware that *cosa nuova sempre piace*, but this of yours was really an extreme case. What have you done? Where have you been? I am not cruel enough to taunt you by asking—whom have you seen? I suppose you have a parson in the parish. I believe there always is one wherever there is a church, and I saw yours on my way here—*et après?*”

“*Après,*” was the reply; “there is our neighbour—our near neighbour, Mrs. Vernon—the mother of my young friend here;” (Lady Devereux drew her eyebrows together, and again glanced at Emily) “her daughter and her son, who is now walking with Mr. Tilden:—then there are half a score of county families within twenty miles, with all of whom we have made a sort of acquaintance.”

“Ah, yes—I perceive. Will you allow me to ring for my maid, and change my dress?”

“I will accompany you,” said my mother, rising as she spoke. “I am quite sure that Miss Vernon will excuse me.”

“Otterford will be here to dinner,” observed Lady Devereux, as she lounged out of the room.

“ Sir Herbert wished him to accompany us ; but he was not proof against a journey with Damon and Phillis ; that is, after their loves had been rendered dull and legitimate by matrimony.” And she disappeared, followed by my mother.

“ And is this the chosen friend of Lady Madeleine Tilden ?” murmured Emily Vernon to herself, as her eye followed their retiring figures ; “ Alas ! alas ! how unfavourable is the impression which she has made on me, beautiful as she is !”

CHAPTER IX.

The distaste which Miss Vernon instinctively felt towards Lady Devereux was returned with interest by Lord Otterford towards her brother. When they met, there was a mutual feeling of distrust and suspicion. The handsome person, insinuating manners, and romantic reputation of Mr. Vernon, had rendered him highly acceptable to my mother ; while to my father, comparatively in a land of strangers, he had stood in the position of an old friend—a link between the past and the present. I have already hinted that he was a vain man ; and I am bound in justice to add that he had become passionately attached to my mother, although she had never for a moment suspected that such was the case. His quiet but zealous attentions had flattered her vanity ; his evident admiration had gratified her self-love ; he had amused her idleness, and piqued her curiosity—but that was all.

Nor had Frederic Vernon any ulterior designs in his adoration of the beautiful wife of his friend. He loved her ardently, but he never looked beyond the moment. He was jealous of every hour that was spent out of her presence; happy under the influence of her smiles; proud of the confidence with which she honoured him; and anxious to render himself necessary to her by every means in his power. Had he been suddenly deprived of her friendship, he would have felt it bitterly. It would have been to him a far more severe trial than his romantic separation from the *Duchessa*; but he never suffered himself to speculate upon such a contingency, and so lived on, *au jour la journée*, occupied only in devising new methods of giving pleasure to the bright object of his homage.

But, as Lord Otterford could only form his judgment of others from his experience of himself, and of his own motives and impulses, so he could not for a moment imagine such a state of things as this. He saw before him a man eminently handsome, evidently well bred, and palpably established as *l'ami de la maison*. He watched him closely for five minutes, and thenceforward honoured him with his hatred. Lord Otterford patronized no half measures.

Was it not enough that throughout his sojourn at Rooksley, he should have Mr. Tilden for ever

in his path? Before the party separated for the night, he had vowed vengeance against this new intruder. But how to accomplish it? "An idle brain is the devil's workshop," says a quaint old proverb; and man seldom prepares the anvil, that his Satanic Majesty fails to provide the hammer!

From the period of Lady Devereux's advent at Rooksley, each day witnessed some new arrival, until the expected party was complete. The gentle Emily was nearly domesticated with her new friends, and became completely so, when important business suddenly and unexpectedly called Mrs. Vernon to town. After having duly escorted his mother on her journey, and seen her safely established in the house of her sister, Frederic returned in all haste to the Priory; for his local knowledge and his ready kindness had rendered him so indispensable to my father, that they saw each other daily, almost hourly. His moments of active usefulness were given to Mr. Tilden; while those of relaxation and feeling were all devoted to his wife.

Rooksley became the scene of perpetual dissipation and amusement. The game had been well preserved, and the prowess of the sportsmen was sufficiently murderous to merit mention in the county paper. Nor was the slaughter within doors inferior to that without. Bright eyes did as certain execution as patent fowling-pieces; and the wet

days and the long evenings were perhaps more full of peril to the said sportsmen than was their own aim to the partridges and pheasants. More than one of them, indeed, ere long abandoned the sport altogether, beneath the influence of some more potent attraction. Among the first—the ladies called them “rationals,” and the gentlemen “deserters”—was Lord Otterford, at whose special instigation the party had originally been made. The sportsman, *par excellence*, whose admirable *tenor* and skilful shot might have suggested the description of a witty poet of more recent times:—

“ ——— Ne'er was such a brown and green
In gaiters or in jacket seen.
Indeed no partridge could do less
Than tremble at the shooting-dress,
In which, through all the livelong day,
Fresh and untired, he blazed away,
Scrambling through bush and briar to trace
Haply, but *half* another brace;
Till, near the house, one might remark
From both his barrels, just at dark,
Two short, smart pops—ill-omened sound,
Echoed o'er many a turnip-ground,
Where coveys fed, in fear and sorrow,
Prophetic of their fate to-morrow.”

His secession was, under the circumstances, matter of amazement to all parties. Sir Herbert Devereux, who lived only during the hunting and

shooting seasons, and contrived unaccountably to exist, he never thoroughly understood *how*, for the rest of the year, was unsparing in his sarcasms and comments; all which produced upon his friend much the same impression as pumice flung against a rock. Lord Otterford was decidedly a man of character.

Surrounded by a phalanx of her own friends, and thus secure from all undue neighbourly familiarity, my mother issued continual invitations to the families who had left their names at Rooksley; while she held herself excused from all return visits by the guests whom she was compelled to entertain at home; and among those who never failed to obey her summons were Mrs. Alexander and her daughters. The lady herself had a passion for making new acquaintance. She was never happy save in a crowd. The elder Miss Alexander, tall, dressy, showy, and perfectly self-possessed, felt that, at eight and twenty, there was no time for her to throw away in solitude, if she ever contemplated an establishment; while poor Caroline was eager to find herself in a house in which she was but too well aware that Frederic Vernon spent two-thirds of his time.

To Lady O'Halloran, the great attraction of Rooksley was the table. She was at once *gourmette* and *gourmande*. During her lord's life they had

kept open house in the county Kildare ; a fact which had compelled her, as a widow, to close her doors. The family estate was, at this period, "at nurse" for her son ; and, as she herself declared, "the lawyers proved very sorry dry-nurses indeed." Lady O'Halloran was universally popular ; she was earnest in everything, and thoroughly good-natured ; frank to a fault, accommodating, *facile à vivre*, and of a temper proof against all trial. To my mother, she was, however, notwithstanding all these social qualifications, displeasing in an imminent degree. To her, the earnest frankness and joyous good humour of the Irish widow conveyed nothing but vulgarity and coarseness ; but as she had no plausible pretext for declining her society, and as she was certain to find her in every visitable house in the neighbourhood, she contented herself by expressing her disgust to her own immediate friends, and suffered her laughing ladyship to be included in every invitation which collected at Rooksley her particular intimates.

Since I have grown old, and have been compelled to make home-avocations, I have found a great resource in novel-reading. I have a few sententious associates, who tell me that such a pursuit is too trifling for my years ; but I let them say on, and read not a volume the less. My retrospective vanity is flattered by the graceful fictions, which so often

make power, wealth, and even virtue itself, bow down before the omnipotence of beauty. I love to identify myself with the bright-eyed heroine; to live over again, in her company, past experiences of triumph; and, although all this may, in point of fact, be trifling, it is only the more consistent, and worthily winds up the life of a pretty woman. Of art, doubtlessly I have had my share in my time: the only science which I ever understood was the science of pleasing; how then was I to gainsay in my old age the pursuits of my whole life?

My motive for this apparent digression is to remark that if, in the said works of fiction, it be admissible for the author, who has all the unities at his control, and who may take what liberties he pleases, both with times, places, and persons, to put ten or twenty years into a parenthesis, I may well be excused for arrogating to myself a similar liberty in writing my own veritable memoirs. All that I have yet placed upon record was, of course, in my case merely traditionary; but I felt it to be necessary that my readers should know my father and mother "in their habits as they lived, with the habits they'd acquired," before I introduced that more important personage—myself; and, as I was born within eighteen months after the marriage of my parents, all reasonable readers must at once concede that I have availed myself of my privilege

with singular discretion. I shall therefore make no apology, my conscience being at peace.

It may be as well, however, to premise that, in the interval, the school-house was completed, and that its expanded wings afforded shelter to twenty aged paupers. The ceremony of the "opening" was a festival for the neighbourhood; there were drums and fiddles, and beer and beef, for the poorer classes; and a procession, in which the children appeared in new uniforms, the old men in blue coats and gray worsted stockings, and the old women in brown gowns and scarlet cloaks. These having been duly installed in their pinnacled and picturesque domicile, the "gentry" were, in their turn, entertained at Rooksley, where a splendid ball succeeded a sumptuous dinner, and where many speeches were made on the disappearance of the ladies, tending to impress upon my father the extent of his worth, and the many virtues of his wife; for which he, deeply impressed by the *unexpected* (!) honour done to Lady Madelaine and himself, returned thanks in a speech eulogistic of the friend who had made himself this "bright honour's mouth-piece," and begged to propose the health of some one else then present, who did the same in his turn, until at length the whole company presented the spectacle of "a suit of dittos;" after which, there remaining nothing of importance to detain them

longer, they joined the guests, who were already rapidly filling the ball-room.

This was the great starting-point of my father's popularity in the county.

It is true that the Duke of Dorchester had not only given the land upon which the original school-house stood, but built the house itself; while his amiable daughters had clothed the children, and, as I have already shown, moreover made them the medium of far more extensive charities; but the Duke had a very expensive family, and had been involved by his sons to an extent which compelled him to sell off a portion of his estates, and to retire into Italy with his daughters for a few years, in order to give him time to retrieve himself.

Now, it was perhaps somewhat unreasonable in his grace of Dorchester, when he disposed of Rooksley, to consider that he had done quite sufficient for the parish, in giving them the said land and house in perpetuity. He should have remembered that the parochial authorities had a claim upon him. He had built the school-house for his own gratification, and it had been a great amusement to the ladies of his family; and such was the opinion of the vestry, when an intimation was made to them at one of their meetings, that some repairs were needed to the building. They very naturally decided that, had not the Duke of Dor-

chester thought proper, at his own instigation, and on his own authority, to build the said school-house, the parish would not have been burthened with its repairs ; the children learnt very well previously in Margery Drake's cottage ; and it was perfectly clear that if noblemen and gentlemen had a fancy for building schools, it was their duty to endow them, and to prevent their becoming a burthen to the parish.

In short, the neat, plain, appropriate little tenement, which had been the admiration of the churchwardens and other local authorities, when it replaced the brick-paved kitchen in which the young ideas in —— had previously been taught to shoot, and for which profuse thanks had been lavished upon his grace on its erection, was no sooner discovered to need some trifling reparation, than it was decided to be “a burthen on the parish ;” and as, under such circumstances, the conscientious members of the “select vestry” would have considered it a dereliction of principle to apply the parochial funds, where it was so clear and self-evident that the Duke of Dorchester was the responsible person, it was unanimously agreed that an official letter should be written to his grace, representing the state of the building ; and suggesting, at the same time, that as the number of scholars had greatly increased of late, some additional forms

and desks would be very acceptable. This luminous idea was at once acted upon ; but the letter superscribed " Immediate," in order that their noble correspondent might not keep them in unnecessary suspense by attending to any irrelevant personal affairs before he replied to it, never received any answer, having been forwarded to Florence from the Duke's town-house, and lost on the way.

My mother, at the suggestion of Emily Vernon, took the affair into her own hands at the most fortunate moment in the world. The slight dilapidations, which, had they been immediately attended to, might have been effectually checked, had increased greatly during the progress of a long and wet winter. The relatives of the children, anxious to preserve them as long as possible from the weather, had patched and pieced the roof during a stray leisure hour, but the great evil remained unremedied ; and, as I have already stated, my mother, in the first burst of her philanthropy, found herself compelled to hire a cottage even for the temporary accommodation of her little *protégées*, before the great work of building the new edifice commenced.

Nothing could have been better timed. The *intention* alone afforded conversation to the whole neighbourhood ; and, when half a score of carpenters and masons, who had been for some weeks out of employ, found themselves once more in full

work, and that the result of their labours began to show itself above ground, the county-paper spread the news far and wide. Paragraphs, headed "PRINCELY LIBERALITY !" "GENEROUS MUNIFICENCE !" and "NOBLE EXAMPLE TO LANDED PROPRIETORS," appeared in weekly succession. The festival of the "opening" settled the business. Not a man got drunk upon my father's strong ale that day, who ever remembered such a gentleman, or who had ever seen such a lady. And when, in the midst of all this excitement, it was ascertained that my father had purchased some extensive farms in the neighbourhood, every individual present was ready, glass in hand, to work upon them for nothing ; an arrangement which would, no doubt, have proved extremely economical, had it ever been acted upon.

Most political reader ! do you not discover the embryo M. P., under all this popularity, and all this acquisition of land ? Of course, you do. Will it be objected that my father was *new* in the county, and that there were old ties and old sympathies still existing, and still dear to true hearts and fast memories ? Pooh, pooh ! the Marquis of Portintown, the Duke's elder son, had, it is true, represented the county during three sessions ; but his noble father was no longer a resident ; and it had been evident, even at the last election, that the

marquis did not "bleed" so freely as formerly ; and, as to the letter which he wrote on the dissolution of parliament, stating his perfect reliance on the steadfastness, good-faith, and old attachment of the "worthy and independent electors of ——," it was, of course, "nothing but proper, and what they had a right to expect, seeing what they *had* done for him ;" but, unfortunately, straightforward, manly letters, even written by the sons of dukes, will not suffice to pay bills, or to supply "unlimited refreshments" at the Angel or the George—and my father was known to be very rich.

The Marquis of Portintown was a superb young man, whose aristocracy was written on his brow ; and he was, moreover, affable, and polite, and considerate. The women were, one and all, in his favour ; but my father had a handsome wife ; and, although the ladies might have the voices, their husbands had the votes.

And thus it occurred that my birth took place on the close of a contested election, during which money, and heavy dinners, and still heavier speeches had been at a discount, although "bribery and corruption" had been scrupulously eschewed. A few small landholders got their farms that year for a pepper-corn rent. The times were hard, and my father's agent was a man of intense feeling. There was an immense display of new gowns and

showy ribbons at church for the next month. My mother was a philanthropist, and liked to see happy faces about her. The circumstances of certain families changed in a sudden and extraordinary manner; but who requires to be reminded of the unaccountable mutations of fortune? The school-children, wearing the Tilden colours, paraded the streets with banners, and created a general feeling of generous enthusiasm; for, when they appeared, they not only reminded the local authorities of what the new candidate had done, but of what the father of the old one had left undone, which was better still.

In short, my father's gold, his agent's tact, and my mother's beauty, carried the day. All the old ducal virtue, and liberality, and munificence were forgotten; but still, it must be said, in my father's praise, that so thoroughly satisfied was the marquis with the frank and manly bearing of his adversary in the struggle, that he consented, at the close of the election, to become a guest at Rooksley for a couple of days, while he arranged certain matters of local business; and where the family tradition declares that the bright eyes of my mother so thrall'd him, that he extended his visit to a week, and ultimately took his departure on the best possible terms with his successor in senatorial honours.

My birth followed closely upon his retreat. Extreme fatigue and excitement had overtasked the strength of my mother; and the establishment was still *sens dessus dessous*, when I appeared to claim some share of the public attention.

CHAPTER X.

My first tangible memory attaches itself to a frock of white muslin, looped on the shoulders with strings of jet. I was supposed to be in mourning for my maternal grandfather, the Right Honourable Alexander Duncan, Earl of Glenfillan. My name was Eveleen ; and I was the pet and plaything of a party of ladies, who passed me from one lap to another, and from one pair of white arms to a second quite as handsome, under the light of a superb chandelier. I believe that this was my *débüt* in polished society, and that I was indebted for my early honours to Lord Otterford ; who, having met me by accident in one of the galleries, when returning from a walk in the park with my nurse, was so enchanted with my likeness to my mother, that he petitioned for my immediate presentation in the drawing-room.

I have said that this was my first *tangible* memory ; but I had many others, misty, indistinct, dreamlike, yet nevertheless far more delight-

ful. Memories of tender endearments lavished on me by day and night ; amid my nursery sports, and over my little bed. The endearments of a fond father, bestowed, in all their tender profusion, upon his first-born. And yet, surely I must have been a breathing disappointment to that fond father, who had doubtlessly sighed for a son and heir, an inheritor of his name ; which, however insignificant it might have appeared to my mother, her friend Lady Devereux, and *id genus omne*, was without doubt a matter of interest to himself. If such indeed I were, however, it was a fact which I never learned. The apparition of my father was to me the signal for a scream of joy ; his presence always brought delight ; but it was not until I grew to girlhood, and was compelled to feel its loss, that I learnt to appreciate his value, both as a father and a man.

The noise, the glare, and the novelty of the drawing-room delighted me. It is probable that, half unconsciously, I looked around for my good genius in this scene of enchantment ; but, be that as it may, it is certain that my father was not there ; while it so chanced that, satisfied with feeling that my nurse was near me, I exhibited no fear, I uttered no cry ; and thus I was transferred from each to each, receiving from every one in turn a word of delighted commendation.

Abandoned, as a matter of course under such circumstances, to the care of hirelings during three-fourths of the day, I imbibed instinctively and unconsciously the germ of the many defects which my after-life so sadly developed. Nor did the violent transition from the high-breeding and luxury of my mother's circle to the sordid and interested tactics of the nursery tend to improve my natural disposition. I came, with my mother's kiss still warm upon my cheek, into my own apartments, to hear the dress, the temper, and, above all, the liberality of her guests freely canvassed. I was so very a child, that all was discussed unhesitatingly before me; and although I understood much of what I heard, it was probably fortunate for me that my perception was not more extensive; for the morals of my mother's intimates met, at times, with quite as little quarter as their manners.

The first lesson which I learnt, and it was by no means inculcated with gentleness, was the necessity of utter silence upon all that occurred in the nursery: I was neither to repeat what I heard there, nor to mention who were its visitors. No wonder that, when I began to be conscious that I understood a great deal which I was not supposed to hear, far less to comprehend, I should instinctively keep this secret as well as the other. I saw much, in caricature, in my own apartments, which

I witnessed in high comedy in the saloon of my mother. If Lord Otterford or Frederic Vernon kissed the hand of Lady Madelaine, so did my father's "gentleman" kiss the cheek of Mrs. Harris. There were the same coquetries, the same grimaces, the same interchange of unmeaning follies; the only difference existed in the fact, that, in one instance, the canvass was touched by the pencil of a master, and in the other daubed by the brush of a sign-painter.

At six years old I was provided with a French governess. She was a sister of Félicie, who had, like herself, been destined to the honours of the dressing-room, but who had not evinced sufficient talent to be entrusted with the toilet of a woman of rank, and who naturally could not condescend to serve a *bourgeoise*.

When my mother decided upon this appendage to my individual establishment, she named it, as a matter of course, to her attendant, who immediately, like an affectionate sister, recommended Mademoiselle Joséphine, who, as she assured her lady, "*avoit des talents extraordinaires pour l'éducation!*" Such an assurance from such a quarter settled the affair at once; my mother merely stipulating that she must "look at" mademoiselle before she was definitively engaged; and as Félicie felt that nothing could be more reasonable, her

extraordinarily talented sister, who was too dull to dress hair and “get up” point-lace, was immediately summoned; and being very pretty, very graceful, and remarkably well-dressed, was secured at once by Lady Madelaine at a high salary, to form my manners and direct my mind.

Her installation in her new dignities followed within a month; the day-nursery was duly promoted into a school-room; and Mrs. Harris, not with the best grace in the world, subsided into vice-president.

Soon after the arrival of Mademoiselle Joséphine we removed to Grosvenor Square. Parliament had assembled, and my father was at his post. It took two or three weeks to settle my mother comfortably for the season. Her arrangements were minute and complicated. During this period I saw but little of her. The rooms appropriated to myself and my preceptress were situated at the back of the house; and save that my father generally came into my sleeping chamber on tip-toe, on his return from St. Stephen's, to kiss me as I slept, and that I was informed of the circumstance on the morrow by my maid, I might well have believed myself to be forgotten.

Nevertheless, Mademoiselle did not participate in my *ennui*. The transition from a home of penury, where she had been daily reproached with a want of

common capacity, which threatened to make her a burthen upon her family, to a situation of authority and trust in the mansion of Lady Madelaine Tilden, was of itself happiness ; but when to this circumstance was superadded the control of a carriage which was called mine, and a liveried lackey, nicknamed in like manner, she was intoxicated with her good fortune.

How I hated the everlasting Park, where we drove slowly to and fro, amid dust, and noise, and clatter ! It used to make my head swim, and my eyes ache. It had, however, a far different effect upon my companion. She was too pretty to pass unobserved. Her identity was soon ascertained ; and Miss Tilden's governess was, ere long, as well known to the horsemen as the Serpentine itself. But if the drives were thus distasteful to me, the walks were a hundredfold worse. I remembered the woods and glades of Rooksley, its glancing lights and shifting shadows, and contrasted them in sadness with the dreary and monotonous garden of the Square, and the unfamiliar and people-thronged avenues of Kensington Gardens. In time, however, I became reconciled to both, and thus the last touch of nature was removed from my heart.

My mother's personal arrangements once made, she turned her attention to myself, and masters of

every description were forthwith provided for me. The exertions of Mademoiselle had already commenced. It was decided that, short as had been the period of her dictatorship, I was undeniably improved—in appearance. I made a more graceful curtsey, had got rid of my shyness, and did not, by any unlandladylike demonstrations of energy, disturb the propriety of my dress.

Nothing could be better! Compliments were showered upon Mademoiselle, and praises upon myself; after which we each made a lower and more elegant curtsey than before, and withdrew to our *ultima thule*.

Under the care of this invaluable preceptress, I learnt to apply the apophthegm which has since been (falsely) attributed to her distinguished countryman Prince Talleyrand, that “words were given to us to disguise our thoughts.”—By the way, how frequently it occurs that the world fastens upon an acknowledged wit, a shrewd saying to which he has never given utterance! It would appear that individuals who occasionally stumble upon a good thing, of which they themselves do not perhaps appreciate the full merit, anxious that it should not be lost, terminate it with “as so and so said;” and in this manner, in order to save their saying, sacrifice themselves. Even so, I should imagine, was the really profound and diplomatic “saw” which I

have just quoted fastened upon the modern Machiavel, who, nevertheless, disclaimed its parentage.

I learnt, also, to agree—at least in words—with every one upon every subject, and never to betray my own sentiments and opinions; to look upon every thing through the medium of expediency; and to appreciate rank and riches beyond all other human attributes.

In this manner, and under this guidance, I alternated between Grosvenor Square and Rooksley, until I had reached eleven years of age. I had been told incidentally that I had a sister, who was born twelve months after myself, but I had never seen her. The reason for this extraordinary fact, as I afterwards ascertained, existed in the circumstance that her birth nearly cost the life of my mother, who continued for many months afterwards a confirmed invalid; while, *pour comble de malheur*, the infant proved so sickly and so irreclaimably plain, that Lady Madelaine could not endure its presence; and it was consequently, at the instigation of my father, sent down to Scotland under the charge of a trusty nurse, and placed in the care of Lady Flora Glenfillan.

I well remember that my first sensation on hearing I had a sister was one of intense delight. I longed to fold her in my arms, to clasp her to my heart. I felt the blood rush into my face, and

the tears into my eyes. For a moment my whole being overflowed with love. But these highly-wrought feelings were soon repressed by Mademoiselle Joséphine; who, not being herself troubled with any particular sentiment towards her own sister, save one of intense jealousy, was at a loss to understand the meaning of my emotion; and who most effectually rebuked it by reminding me that had *Milady* considered this invisible sister as so great a blessing, she would not have been exiled from her paternal home; that I should be more reasonable if I gave myself the trouble to recollect that my fortune would be diminished one half by the birth of this sister, whom I was prepared to love so ardently; and who, being both ugly and sickly, would, of course, be constantly envious of my beauty and grace.

No argument was ever more effective. I dried my tears, stilled the beating of my heart, and sat down to think! What subjects of reflection were these for a pure young mind! No marvel, trained as I had been, that the evil seed took root quickly; and that, at the close of the longest fit of musing in which I had ever indulged, I almost loved Mademoiselle Joséphine for the *generous devotion* to my interests, which made her so vehement against my unknown sister.

It *was* provoking that I, certain as I was of cre-

ating a sensation by my beauty, should be robbed of half my wealth by one so greatly my inferior. Mademoiselle was right. This unwished-for and unloved younger sister was better away. This was my conviction at eleven years of age ; and as my mother had never in her life mentioned to me the existence of her second child, I had no difficulty in avoiding the subject.

Of my father I saw less than ever. As a public man he was popular and powerful, but at home he was a cipher. No voice had ever been raised against Lady Madelaine ; no murmur low but deep had ever turned towards her the eye of suspicion or the finger of scorn ; but my father was no less a wretched man. Fortunate indeed was it for him that ambition was the most powerful principle of his nature ; for it enabled him to pass by without comment or expostulation those thousand small and minute indications of indifference and supercilious coldness which characterized the bearing of my mother. He felt that they were touched so lightly and so skillfully, that, taken individually, they would be almost imperceptible to a common observer, and that the world could have no sympathy with such sorrows. He therefore folded them closely in his heart ; and, satisfied that the very egotism of my mother's nature was his best safeguard against dishonour, endeavoured to forget, in the vortex of political ex-

citement, that he had ever formed dearer visions of happiness.

Many who were acquainted with public men and public measures upwards of half a century ago, will have little trouble in deciding the identity of my father.

I have already said that I had attained my eleventh year. I had naturally quick talents, and great powers of observation ; it was consequently not wonderful that my progress in all womanly accomplishments was rapid. My masters spoke of me in flattering terms : my mother's guests fondled and praised the "show-child" who relieved their high-bred weariness with her harp or with her voice ; and forgot that the same instinct which awoke in me the power of combination and exertion in the one instance, was not likely to lie dormant where my own personal feelings were still more active and acute.

Young as I was, I required no prompter to point out to me that my mother lived only for admiration, and that among the most devoted of her slaves were Lord Otterford and Mr. Frederic Vernon ; but I also discovered more than this. I saw that the sweet and dove-eyed Emily,—she, whose caresses were to me the most welcome, and whose praises were the most judicious and well-timed,—loved the selfish and cold-hearted nobleman who wore my

mother's chains. How often did I long to clasp my arms about her neck, and tell her how, in my young spirit, I loathed—I knew not, and cared not wherefore—that polished hypocrite! But I had studied in too false a school to give way to so natural and pure an impulse; and so I looked on, and marvelled, and reasoned with myself, as children will do, upon the social phenomena that were taking place about me.

I was not then aware of the vow taken by Otterford on his first meeting with Frederic Vernon; or, in the pale cheek and aching heart of the fair and innocent girl before me, I might have traced the operations of his vengeance.

How well do I remember a certain evening in august! The first dressing-bell had rung, and all the Rooksley guests had obeyed its summons. As I was, of course, excluded by my tender age from my mother's table, it conveyed no warning to me, and I consequently lingered in the drawing-room after it was deserted. For a time I amused myself among the costly toys which were scattered in all directions; but, as they were familiar to me, I soon wearied of an occupation so devoid of novelty; and being attracted by an unusually brilliant sunset, I sauntered into a smaller apartment formed in one of the turrets, and known as the octagon-room; a place of comparative retreat occasionally sought by those of

the company to whom, from some passing cause, the movement and hilarity of the more public reception-room were for a moment distasteful. The large bayed window stood invitingly open, and I approached it, and leant out, watching the rich and changeful colours of the western sky, unconscious that I was screened from observation by the ample crimson curtain which was drawn partially across the recess.

How long I had been thus engaged I know not, when I was aware of voices in the adjoining apartment, and immediately afterwards, of steps approaching the spot on which I stood. My first impulse was to discover myself, but a feeling of false shame—a fear of appearing to have overheard what had been already said—deterred me; and I drew still farther back behind the folds of the damask drapery. Perhaps, had another moment been left to me for decision, I might have obeyed the better prompting which had suggested my first thought, but the hesitation of an instant had rendered this impossible. My heart beat painfully. Accustomed as I had been to mean and unworthy theories, I had never yet reduced them to practice; and I consequently shrank like a coward from the bare semblance of a dishonesty which I had still nerve enough to execute.

The voices became more distinct—they were

those of Miss Vernon and Lord Otterford. There was a tender persuasiveness in his tones, which struck me on the instant. I had heard him gay, and sententious, and sentimental, and even eloquent; but this was an inflexion of his voice altogether new to me. They entered the room—they paused beside the window, just beyond the curtain, where the last beam of the rapidly descending sun sent a ray of brightness to the brow of Emily, and made her luxuriant hair glitter like threads of gold. She was hanging upon the arm of her companion, heavily, languidly, like one who rather sought than needed his support.

I was still a mere child, but I had already read her secret—she loved him!

What a rush of thought swept across my brain! I was bewildered. I had seen him look into my mother's eyes, as though he knew no other light. I had seen him bow to her slightest caprice, as though her will invested it with reason: and yet there could be no doubt that he loved my best friend, my gentle, indulgent Emily. I was lost in difficulty. Had I even doubted the latter fact, I should at once have had that doubt removed when he next spoke, and that I could distinguish his words.

“You are ungenerous, Emily;” he said, in an accent of tender reproach; “you accord nothing

to the difficulty of my position. Why will you thus persist in misinterpreting my every word and action?"

A deep and painful sigh was the only answer.

"Look dispassionately at my very delicate and peculiar position in this family, my sweet girl;" resumed his lordship. "You are well aware that my cousin Lady Devereux is Lady Madelaine's chosen friend—that I have known her for years—and that, in short, like all spoiled beauties, she exacts unlimited devotion from her male acquaintance. See your own brother, for example! Has he eyes, ears, or senses, for any woman save our fair and haughty hostess? And yet, do you believe that if his heart were to speak in opposition to his fancy, his reason would not soon sever the idle links which bind him now? Fie! fie! You are a child, my dear one, and must be schooled into more sober judgment."

"But Frederic," faltered Miss Vernon, "never knew, never loved Lady Madelaine before her marriage; and I have heard——"

"What?" interposed her companion impetuously; "that, in all probability, I did both. Why, this is still more idle! I *did* know this vain beauty in her first youth—in all the insolent glory of her opening loveliness—and yet you see that I have survived her union with Mr. Tilden. Think

you that had I willed she should be mine, she, with her haughty and imperious spirit, would have rejected me, to give her noble hand to a commoner? Surely you know her better."

"All this may be, my lord;" was the reply; "and yet I feel degraded by the part which I am now playing. To me your suit can but bring honour, and surely to yourself it can convey no disgrace. *I* also am a commoner, the titleless daughter of a gentleman, but one of no mean race, and of no tarnished memory. I have done wrong, very wrong, in so long permitting you to talk to me on such a subject, without the knowledge of my mother. While you are present, I find a thousand excuses for my weakness; but when I am alone, my reflexions are one long reproach."

"These refinements, Emily," said the wily voice of her lover, "are unworthy of you—of both of us. If you believe that there never existed a man insensible to the spells of this wedded Circe, then must I frankly tell you that you argue from your perfect ignorance of the world, and in the very wantonness of your own oversusceptible nature. Am I too bold if I ask more even-handed justice?"

"It may be as you say," replied Miss Vernon; "but as the Circe—since you see fit so to designate your friend and mine, is the wife of another, why

should there exist a necessity for the mystery which you have flung over our mutual affection? The ambition of my own mother would have been satisfied with less. She asks for my husband only a gentleman, and a man of honour; and her principle is to me sacred. Do me justice, my lord; I am no love-sick girl. That I esteem you—that I—in short—I scarcely know what I meant to say; but of this be assured, that if, since the moment of enthusiasm which prompted you to tell me that you loved me, you have seen cause to regret the impulse—if, in calmer hours, you have thought it probable that a union with myself would not realize the hopes of your family—your own views in life—or the interests of your ambition—speak frankly. Be assured that, far from reproaching, I shall honour you, and reverence your truth. There are some things, my lord, which are often learned too late for all parties concerned.”

There was an instant's pause. His habitually fluent lordship was evidently probed to the quick, but he soon rallied.

“ I see—I see it all;” he said with a light and bitter laugh. “ You are kind, you are generous, Miss Vernon, to open my eyes at once. It saves suspense—it spares the necessity of doubt. And now, perhaps, in this moment of overweening confidence, you will even entrust me with the whole

secret, and tell me who is the happy man by whom I am so suddenly supplanted. Sir James Dornton is, as I am well aware, an Apollo in the eyes of your sex ; and De Clifford is a *millionaire*. I must abide my fate."

"My lord," said Emily haughtily, as she raised her drooping head, and withdrew her hand from his supporting arm ; "you outrage me, and I have not deserved this insult. But I appeal to yourself—to your own ideas of justice and propriety—whether the silence which you have imposed upon me, on the most important measure of my whole life, is either womanly or correct? I would be respected as well as loved."

"You are both—on my soul, both !" exclaimed Lord Otterford, re-possessing himself of the hand that she had withdrawn ; "but, for the moment, all mention of our mutual attachment would be inexpedient in the highest degree. Can you not trust me? Have you, rigid moralist as you are, given your heart to a man in whose good faith you have no confidence? I will not—I dare not believe it. I ask only for time, and I ask it for my own sake, fondly hoping that I can urge no stronger plea."

"But surely to my mother—" murmured the soft and tremulous voice of the agitated girl.

"I have done"—said his lordship coldly in his

turn. "I have deceived myself, and have no desire to blame you in what has taken place. I have, perhaps, merited no better treatment."

The sound of low and suffocating sobs succeeded.

"Nay, nay; do not distress yourself, Miss Vernon," pursued Lord Otterford; "we will mutually forget and forgive. You will probably hear of me occasionally, and you shall have no reason to deprecate the period of our friendship—of our intimacy—of our —"

"I cannot bear this, my lord; indeed I cannot bear it;" wept his victim. "Why will you so wilfully misunderstand me? Do not confound me with the heartless coquettes of fashionable life. Remember that I have been educated in retirement—that I am unused to the world's ways—that I am but as a child in your hands."

"Only swear to me that you love me!"

Again there was an instant of deep silence.

"Do you really love me, Emily?"

"Deeply—devotedly!"

The murmuring lips were silenced by a kiss. I heard it—I felt it—and I hated him thenceforward with a tenfold hatred.

"And you will trust me?"

"As my own soul."

And once more she hung upon his arm; her hand was clasped in his; and his breath trembled

in her hair. They stood thus for several minutes, and then it was the voice of Emily which broke the stillness.

“ Only promise me that you will be less engrossed by Lady Madelaine. I love her. She is my friend. I am ashamed of my own weakness ; but when I see you devoting your every care, your every thought to her, I feel as though my heart would break.”

I heard a sudden movement. I leaned forward. I saw Miss Vernon clasped to the heart of her lover. Her head rested on his shoulder ; her lovely face was hidden in his breast ; but it was only for a moment. By a sudden and determined action she liberated herself from his grasp, and I saw the tears stealing silently down her cheeks.

“ You are answered, Emily ;” said Lord Otterford, as he stood tenderly beside her. “ Is it possible that *you*—you, young, pure, innocent, and lovely, can be jealous of the meretricious attractions of a practised woman of the world ? How little do you know our sex ! How little are you able to appreciate the merits of your own ! Should you indeed require the assurance that I more value the clasp of this small white hand than all the blandishments that can be lavished upon me by a Lady Madelaine Tilden ?”

“ Yet, why, why do I feel so self-reproached ?”

“ Because, dear girl, you love for the first time,

and love is born of fear. See, now, how very a coward it can make of me ! I shall not approach her splendid ladyship to-night, without the dread of seeing tears in the deep blue eyes which may be turned upon me."

"Not tears, my lord !"

"Yes, tears, my little lady. Traitorous tears, springing from want of faith where faith is due. Know you not that such faith will be your bounden duty, when——"

"Enough, enough ;" said his companion ; and the tones of her voice were rich and mellow with happiness ; "I will promise to be less weak."

"I must have a pledge."

"My honour"—said Miss Vernon, almost gaily.

Lord Otterford laughed. The laugh grated unpleasantly upon my ear.

"Shylock, who was learned in bonds and mortgages, refused so untangible a deposit. I must have better security."

"My bracelet"—laughed Miss Vernon—in her turn, but in a different spirit, as she affected to unclasp the jewel from her arm.

"Your lips !" whispered her lover ; and once more he pressed them to his own. His peace was made.

Voices were heard in the next room. Twilight had fallen over the earth. The servants were busied

in lighting the lamps : and, ere long, the dinner-bell rang out. The supposed solitude of the lovers was over ; yet still they stood an instant side by side, and hand in hand. They spoke no more. There was no need of words.

A light laugh in the drawing-room heralded the re-entrance of Lady Devereux, and her cousin immediately sauntered forth to meet her, after one long last look into the eyes of Emily. For a moment she believed herself alone. She stood where he had left her, motionless. Gradually, her head sank upon her bosom ; and a deep sigh, drawn from the very depths of her spirit, fell sadly on the silence. After a time she rallied, but it was evidently by a violent and painful effort : a slight shiver passed over her graceful limbs ; and then she hastily approached the window, and leaned out, as if greedy of the refreshing breeze which swept into the apartment.

Need I say that I shrank into the most remote corner of my retreat ? I felt as though I should expire upon the spot. My brow burned ; my heart beat almost to bursting ; my clenched hands were rigid in their tension. I had heard my mother mocked at—made the theme of scorn and banter—branded as a Circe !—and, although I knew not then the precise meaning of the appellation, the tone in which it had been applied had left me little

doubt that it was one which reflected slight honour upon her own.

And still Emily Vernon stood there, and I had no opportunity of escape. I thought that I was suddenly smitten with fever. I felt the curtain quiver with the trembling of my limbs. My tongue was parched, and I had set my teeth so hard, that I heard the labouring breath as it escaped from between them. But she heard nothing. She was alone in that still hour of darkness, with her love, and with her doubts. Ay, they were there still—hushed, but not annihilated; for she sighed, and at intervals swept from her cheeks the tears which had gathered there, and shuddered, as if some vision darker than the night had risen upon her spirit. Poor Emily! Even in the paroxysm of my rage, I pitied her. There was a prophet-whisper in her ear that told of ills to come!

When she at length withdrew her head from the window, smoothed her bright hair, and slowly prepared to leave the room, the sound of voices was loud in the next apartment. There was no other egress from the retreat that she had chosen; and accordingly, after shrinking back into the darkness more than once, she eventually disappeared; and then I threw myself upon a sofa, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XI.

Had I been differently constituted, or had I been differently educated, I should probably at once have made my way to my mother's dressing-room, and, in the frank and overflowing confidence of girlhood, have told her all. No such idea, however, crossed my brain even for a moment. I had never been a child. I had sprung from the infant into the woman, as the hothouse flower is forced into premature blossom by unnatural warmth. The examples by which I was surrounded, the spirit in which I was tutored, the self-appreciation in which I was encouraged, all tended to the same point. I felt as if upon me, and me only, devolved the duty of revenging the affront offered to *my* parent.

The vengeance of a girl of eleven years of age appears absurd, and no doubt generally is so. I know one tall hoyden, of about that period of life, whose ideas of mischief to others were all concentrated in throwing stones at them; and laughable

as this may seem, it is doubtlessly quite as rational as many other methods of revenge adopted by children of the same age ; but such is not universally the case. All we adults and centinarians may rest assured that there are many instances of precocious thought as well as of precocious action ; and we should be wise to remember that there is a small species of worm in existence which has frequently destroyed a three-decker.

Had I been able to appreciate my father's real character, it is also probable that I might have unveiled to him the true moral qualities of my mother's favourite guest : but with the close of my infancy came also the cessation of that demonstrative paternal tenderness which had made the joy of my baby-life. I no sooner degenerated into the plaything of the drawing-room, differing only in stature from those about me ; engrossed by the same vanities, encouraging the same selfishness, and eager after the same adulation, than my father seemed altogether to have forgotten my existence. He visited my little bed no more. When we accidentally met, he had always a kind word and a hasty kiss for me ; but neither his voice nor his caress was what it had once been ; and as occasionally, when more hurried than common, instead of pressing his lips to mine, he merely greeted me with, " Ha, Eveleen, is that you ? " and patted me

on the head without stopping, my dignity took offence, and I universally returned the salutation by, "Really, papa, you are too bad ; you derange my hair in a shocking manner !"

My poor father ! How, as I look back upon these things, I can now understand what closed his once loving heart against his home, making a cold and careless world the shrine at which he knelt, and that world's smile his idol.

Under all circumstances, it cannot, however, be matter of surprise that I confided not my secret to any one. In about half an hour, during which time coffee had been served in the drawing-room, and my retreat had continued uninvaded, I contrived to overcome my agitation ; and, creeping once more to the fatal window, I turned my hot brow and my aching eyes towards the sweet evening wind that was lifting the leaves of the trees and the buds of the flowers, and weaving a double web of perfume and melody over the bosom of nature. I had, however, at the moment, no such poetical association with the said wind. All I sought was that it should restore the freshness to my forehead and the brightness to my eyes ; that it should, in short, be an efficient aid in my first grand essay in hypocrisy. And it was so ; the fair, full cheek and the sparkling eye of early youth do not tell their tale of suffering like the worn features of after-

years. The green and vigorous leaves of june, moistened though they may be by the thunder-shower, are restored to vigour and to beauty by the next gush of sunshine ; but those which have out-lived the summer months are scattered by the rain-drops, less heavy, perhaps, but more frequent, to which they are exposed.

Even so was it with me. Ten minutes after I had mastered my emotion, and sought in the sweet influences of nature for the relief I needed, I was once more perfectly presentable ; and did not hesitate to join my mother's guests : but I re-entered not that luxurious drawing-room as I had left it. The best and purest moral remnant of my girlhood had been torn away. I had learnt that even my own proud and beautiful mother had descended from her pedestal, and could be spoken of in other terms than those of adoration. Emily, too, the mild, the loving, the gentle Emily, whom hitherto I had considered faultless, she had also her secret sin—her cherished hypocrisy—her dangerous mystery. As for Otterford, words have no power to tell how bitterly, how utterly I loathed him.

As I passed into the saloon, I saw him, as I had seen him a hundred times before, lolling over the back of the large lounging-chair which was sacred to Lady Madelaine. The company

were scattered in groups over the room ; Lady Devereux and Frederic Vernon occupied the same Persian couch, and were almost lost among the yielding cushions. I had grown an age in experience within the last two hours ; and the first fruits of my awakened perceptions might have been discovered in the fixed and almost stern attention with which I observed these two friends of my mother. Lady Devereux was languidly, but not the less assiduously, endeavouring to appropriate the thoughts and glances of the handsome young man beside her. Her magnificent arm, half veiled by rich black lace, lay, in all its rounded beauty, upon the pillow against which he leant. The ample folds of her black velvet dress were confined by a plain girdle, clasped with jewels, which drew the eye to the smallness of her waist, and the fulness of her beautifully-moulded neck. Her little feet were coquettishly grouped together upon a cushion, and were visible beneath the embroidered stockings even to the well-turned ancle. There was an arch smile playing about her lips, and a languid softness glistening in her eyes, which rendered her more beautiful than I had ever previously believed her to be.

As I advanced up the room, I saw that she was speaking playfully, almost tenderly, though I could not hear her words ; but a single glance sufficed to

show me that her companion little heeded their import. His look was riveted upon my mother; not fully and freely, but with all the caution of one who cares not that his secret should be read by idle eyes—and how full of misery was that look!

I followed its direction. The triumph of unstriving and undoubting vanity sat on my mother's brow, and flushed her cheek. Her eyes were closed, but the play of her rich lips, and the frequent motion of her small head, showed that she did not listen unheedingly to the low murmur that fell upon her ear. And Lord Otterford? He it was who was breathing those honeyed sounds; but though he bent over Lady Madelaine, his gaze was turned elsewhere. Emily Vernon stood near the harp, which she had been engaged in tuning, and at her side was Mr. De Clifford. To those who, unlike myself, were not in the secret of Miss Vernon's heart, she must have appeared all calmness and mental repose. The tears had been dried, the pulse had ceased its tumultuous throbbings, the flush had faded from the fevered brow; she was graceful, easy, and self-possessed. Her taper fingers wantoned among the chords of the instrument; her small foot pressed down the yielding pedals; and ultimately, at the close of a brilliant prelude, she shook back her long ringlets, and looked up with a smile in reply to a remark of

De Clifford's, when her eye chancing to wander further, I saw her suddenly falter and turn pale ; the smile fled from her lips and the light from her countenance ; while at the same moment Lord Otterford started from his position near my mother, and, passing rapidly beside her, I heard the word " Woman !" breathed bitterly from between his clenched teeth.

Here, then, was another coil of the reptile ; for, in my present excited and suspicious state of feeling, I was at no loss to read in the alarmed expression of De Clifford's face, as he marked the change which had so suddenly come over his fair companion, a more lively interest than mere friendship would have inspired. He loved her—but the serpent had already made its way into his Eden ; his dream was nearly over.

Lady O'Halloran was asleep. Miss Alexander was endeavouring to draw the fashionable and fastidious Sir James Dornton into a flirtation ; and her sister sat apart, beyond the more busy guests, with her eyes riveted on Frederic Vernon. Mrs. Alexander, all blonde and bracelets, was doing her utmost to appear interested in a political discussion which was going on between my father and Lord Cornbury, a brother member ; while good old Dr. James, more sincere, and already outwearied by their prolixity, had settled himself comfortably in

an ample *fauteuil*, and was half way to the land of dreams.

How false, how hollow, and how tedious, every thing appeared to me, child as I was! I felt saddened, disappointed, dissatisfied. I had indeed succeeded in subduing all trace of the violent emotion which I had lately undergone; but I soon discovered that I had by no means resumed my ordinary manner, from the expression of my father's eye, as, during a pause in his conversation, it chanced to turn upon me.

"You are unwell, Eveleen;" he said tenderly, as he approached and took my hand. "Your cheek is pale, my poor child; these hours and these habits are undermining your health. Would that I could see it otherwise!"

I felt a deep blush rise to my brow. "Indeed I am well, quite well;" I answered hurriedly. "I have been annoyed—agitated—but it is all over now."

"And may a grave, middle-aged, old-fashioned individual, like myself," said Lord Cornbury, in a tone of quiet sarcasm, as he also approached and seated himself upon the sofa beside me, "venture to inquire what event can have occurred of sufficient importance to 'agitate' and 'annoy' the charming Miss Tilden, the embryo beauty, the precocious wit, and the envied heiress?"

It was the first time that I had ever been ad-

dressed in such an accent, and my indignation fully equalled my surprise; nor was it by any means diminished when, on glancing towards my father, as though I looked to him to revenge the insult, I saw a quiet smile dancing in his eye, and playing about the corners of his mouth. I was petrified. I could not have spoken had my earthly happiness depended on the exertion: but I felt my form dilate, and a frown of offended dignity gather upon my brow.

“What is the meaning of this, Eveleen?” asked my father somewhat severely, after a moment’s pause. “Did you not hear Lord Cornbury address you? and have you forgotten—quite!—” and he sighed as he spoke; “that you are yet a child, and should be grateful for the notice which is accorded to you?”

I hesitated for an instant; and then, turning calmly towards the astonished nobleman, I said with all the composure I could command; “Since Lord Cornbury is obliging enough to take so evident an interest in my joys and sorrows, and since it is my father’s wish that I should do so, I feel bound to inform him that I have been ‘annoyed’ to find falsehood where I looked for truth, and ‘agitated’ to discover hypocrisy where nothing but sincerity should have existed.” And, as I ceased speaking, I rose from the sofa, curtsied ceremo-

niously to my father and his companion, and moved away.

“ An extraordinary girl that, Tilden, i’faith ;” I heard his lordship exclaim as I crossed the floor. My father’s reply I could not catch ; and the rather that, as I approached Miss Alexander, (who was just in the act of commencing a laborious sonata to Mr. De Clifford’s flute accompaniment, evidently much to her own annoyance, and equally to the relief of Sir James Dornton, whose flirting vocabulary was fairly at its close, in so far as it regarded herself), I saw poor Emily, half concealed behind the folds of an Indian screen, pale, listless, and drooping. Otterford, meanwhile, had resumed his station near my mother, and they were supposed to be deeply engaged in a game of chess.

It must not be imagined that, at so early an age, I was able to estimate, or even wise enough to glance at, the probable results to my mother’s reputation, of the heedless and reckless loose which she was thus giving to her vanity. My only and absorbing feeling was one of haughty indignation against the man who had *dared* to love another, while he professed to be her slave ; nor can I deny that a considerable portion of this displeasure was reflected upon Emily herself. I knew nothing *then* of the tyranny of an awakened passion. I

looked not beyond the visible homage which, from the moment of my admission to my mother's circle, had been the immediate object of my ambition. I had believed it to be real and genuine—a spontaneous offering at the shrine of beauty—and I was by no means prepared to find that it was a mere pleasing delusion—a shadow upon the wall—a vapour! I had heard at least twenty times a day of my own loveliness; for, when it became the fashion in the saloon to enumerate all my childish attractions, I was forthwith the admired idol of the servants' hall. Not a footman passed me on my way from the nurseries to the drawing-room who did not assume a countenance of wondering admiration as he stepped aside; not a female servant, from the housekeeper to the laundry-maid, who did not utter a whispered comment loud enough to meet my ear, and flattering enough to make my little heart beat more quickly; while my inestimable governess, as time went by, buckled on the armour of her ignorance in quiet, satisfied that with my beauty, and my six masters—(there were no professors *then* for young ladies!)—I was quite independent of *her* teaching; and she was frank enough to tell me so.

The understanding was a comfortable one; as, being under no obligation to Mademoiselle, even for doing her best, which I must have been, at

least morally, had she made a stand against her own ignorance, and struggled to do her duty, I was thus enabled to despise her at my ease ; which I accordingly did, at an age when I should not yet have been permitted to form an opinion of those about me.

Sycophants, paid and unpaid, how little do ye reflect upon the pernicious consequences of your time-serving and degrading'condescension, especially upon the minds of the young !

Years have passed—long, and weary, and eventful years, since the evening which I am now endeavouring to describe ; since that first awakening of doubt, and suspicion, and hatred, in my girlish heart ; and yet is all as distinct and fresh about me, even as when the moments were speeding by. It was a dark lesson, which I was never to unlearn. It taught me to muse, to reason, and to combine, upon subjects ill-fitted to my age. It laid a false foundation for my after-life.

I roused Miss Vernon from her reverie. At first my conversation was evidently irksome to her ; but, as she strove against her pre-occupation, it became a palpable relief. I watched her narrowly. At times she sighed, even when we were speaking on the most indifferent subjects ; and at others her eyes wandered to the chess-table, and she answered, as if unconsciously and quite irrelevantly, to my

questions. Had she loved any other than Lord Otterford, I could have wept over her !

I once read a quaint German story, in which the secret marriage of a wealthy young widow, whose fortune was to be forfeited in the event of her disposing of her hand a second time, was betrayed to the watchful eyes of the heirs-at-law, by the fact of her dropping her fan in society, while in conversation with her new husband, and picking it up herself without his interference. I was then ignorant of the tale ; but assuredly, judging from such premises, my mother was as free as air. Her slightest gesture was sufficient. One would have thought that Otterford could read her heart, and that speech was, in her case, supererogatory.

Six weeks afterwards my mother returned to Grosvenor Square for the season ; and for the first time I was left at Rooksley, under the very satisfactory and efficient charge of Mademoiselle Joséphine. My pride was wounded : I had begun to believe that I was necessary to the happiness of Lady Madelaine. It was a natural mistake. In her drawing-room in the country I was an attractive ornament. I created conversation, and I afforded to the guests in the house numerous and happy opportunities of flattering my mother, both directly and inferentially. I was a miniature representative of the prevailing fashion,

however *outrée* ; thus proving to the initiated that if the beautiful wife of Mr. Tilden clung to the graceful and the becoming, it was purely from taste, and not from lack of acquaintance with the reigning mode. My flippancy had been elevated into wit ; and as children are naturally fearless, I had more than once spoken with a point well calculated to amuse all save those who were the sufferers ; while my whole education had been conducted on a system of surface and display, which made me a welcome plaything to the idle and the unthinking.

Religion I had none. Mademoiselle tried the village church, and the preaching of good Dr. James, on one solitary occasion, and then pleaded her conscience as an excuse for absenting herself thenceforward. I had occasionally accompanied my mother and her party ; but as the family-pew was closely curtained round with heavy damask, and I sat on a cushion beside the fire, amusing myself with the richly illustrated prayer-books, and catching fragments of their conversation, which out of respect for the place was carried on in soft whispers, and thereby only rendered the more attractive, I seldom heard more than the responses, and the extremely inharmonious singing of the children of Lady Madelaine's schools, which, even at that early age, used to set my teeth on edge.

My notions of religion were consequently of a very vague and unformed description. When, as I sometimes saw my mother and her guests preparing to attend the morning service with undisguised and even acknowledged reluctance, I ventured to inquire for what reason she submitted to an annoyance which it was in her power to avoid, she answered me very sententiously that she went to church "for the sake of example"—that "it was necessary that the lower orders should see persons of station uphold the clergy, or they might presume to absent themselves in their turn, which was a thing not to be thought of." She did not explain for what reason, nor did I inquire, for she was evidently weary of the subject; while I, on my side, felt no particular interest in its continuance. I was accordingly quite satisfied from that time forth, whenever I swelled the train of my mother on this septenary duty, that I was setting an example to "the lower orders," and was consequently a person of considerable importance both to Dr. James and his parish.

Such was I, in body and mind, at the close of my eleventh year. My entrance into the twelfth was unwitnessed by any save my own attendants; for, as I have already stated, I was left at Rooksley on the next departure of the family for town.

I pouted for eight-and-forty hours after their

departure. My father had kissed me hurriedly, and put five guineas into my hand, as he stepped into his chariot. My mother had pressed her lips to my brow, and then turned away to desire Mademoiselle not to suffer me to spoil my complexion over the fire. Lady Devereux had saluted me with an injunction not to grow any taller, lest in a year or two I should oblige Lady Madelaine to shut me up, and keep me out of sight; while the gentlemen were all so much occupied in final arrangements about their dogs, their horses, and their guns, that they overlooked my existence altogether.

Emily Vernon was the only individual of the party who embraced me with effusion and evident regret. She was to be Lady Madelaine's travelling companion to town, and then to join her mother in Curzon Street. What a long, sad, wistful gaze she turned upon all the familiar objects from which she was about to separate! She visited the octagon room more than once: it had, doubtless, been the locality of many similar scenes to that which I had witnessed; and in what had they terminated so far? Even I could read the riddle on her pure young brow—in uncertainty and doubt, in anxiety and heart-sickness. Poor Emily! and amid all her sorrow, she was the only one who thought of me.

My heart swelled with resentment as I saw the party disappear ; and I retreated to my room, fully resolved to tax the patience of Mademoiselle Joséphine to the uttermost, by the manifestations of my virtuous indignation. But, alas ! I had no opportunity of so doing, for during two hours no Mademoiselle made her appearance. I was totally abandoned. This was, indeed, a new phase of my existence ! Had not the little French clock upon my mantelpiece convinced me that my solitude had endured no longer than the said hundred and twenty minutes, I should have computed it at a day, so sad, and weary, and desolate did it appear. I rang the bell. It was answered by my own footman ; and even he, as he opened the door, was evidently working himself into his coat, as though he had drawn it on hurriedly. I inquired for Mademoiselle. She was just then particularly engaged with the housekeeper. Did I want anything ? I replied that I did not think proper to be left any longer alone ; and I was met by the remark that my harp-master would be with me in less than twenty minutes ; at the close of which obliging and pleasant piece of information the man hastily withdrew, before I could make any rejoinder.

This was the commencement of my new mode of existence ; and such, with very slight variations, it continued. The visits of my several tutors

broke in, agreeably rather than the reverse, upon the daily monotony ; and, moreover, a sudden fancy for carriage-exercise seized upon my preceptress. It is true that, eschewing all the romantic cross-roads which had hitherto been familiar to us, we no longer drove in any other direction than to the post-town, where Mademoiselle lounged from one shop to the other, making purchases of the most heterogeneous description, and collecting all the gossip of the neighbourhood.

To me, young as I was, these hitherto forbidden excursions were disagreeable to an extreme degree. I had never forgotten the malicious innuendoes and withering witticisms which formed the staple conversation of my nursery ; and, since I had become habituated to the polished elegance and epigrammatic wit of my mother's circle, the female cackle to which I was occasionally condemned in my own apartments was absolutely abhorrent. It may well be supposed, therefore, that I in no wise interfered with the new vocation of Mademoiselle Joséphine ; and it was while she was collecting her "shreds and patches" for the edification of the housekeeper's room, that I first imbibed that love of books, to which I am indebted for some of the happiest hours in my stormy existence.

It will readily be understood that I had not been idle during the fortnight which intervened between

the eventful evening last described and the departure of the family for town. I had closely watched the chief actors in the "Comedy of Errors," represented at Rooksley. The more narrowly I observed my mother, the more plainly I discovered that her vanity was a shrine, before which she required that a lamp should be constantly burning ; but that her affections were quite independent of her self-esteem. Now, as there existed nothing upon earth half so attractive in my eyes as my mother, and, as children ever seek to imitate those whom they admire, so my scrutiny only made me the more steadfastly resolve to emulate the Lady Madelaine in all things. That I resembled her in person had been so endlessly repeated in my presence, that I was already aware of my natural advantages. Merely to be the object of general comment and admiration did not, however, satisfy me ; I felt that there was a marked and unpleasant distinction between the homage paid to my mother, and the caresses lavished upon myself ; and for some time, as I pondered over this fact in my enforced solitude, I was unable to comprehend it.

For a while my vanity had been gratified by the flatteries and blandishments poured out upon me ; but, the feeling once awakened, that I was not worshipped like my mother, thenceforward ren-

dered the triumph incomplete ; and my pride was wounded as I remembered that, while I had merely been the pet and plaything of the idle and the thoughtless, Lady Madelaine was an object of deep and exclusive devotion ; making the happiness of one worshipper, and the misery of another. Why was this ?

I was on the threshold of my twelfth year. I had been the almost constant companion of a young, giddy, flirting, and ignorant French governess since I emerged from the nursery, the remainder of my life having been spent in the society of my mother and her friends. Is it then matter of surprise that I soon discovered the solution of the enigma ? “ My mother is loved ! ” I whispered to myself ; “ and I——they look upon me still as a child, but this will not last for ever. Emily Vernon is younger than Lady Madelaine, and yet Lord Otterford loves her—ay, and better than he loves my mother ; for did he not, to make Miss Vernon smile, call her a Circe ? I will know what he meant.”

I seized my dictionary, but I sought in vain. I was in despair ; when, as a forlorn hope, I appealed to Mademoiselle. “ *Circé, Circé ! mais certainement ;* ” said she, as a sudden recollection came upon her, “ *Circé, c'est une déesse.* I remember an old schoolfellow of mine, *qui fit un très beau mariage.* She became a *modiste fort distinguée, Rue Richelieu,*

and her *enseigne* was A LA CIRCE. *C'étoit une tête charmante, et admirablement coiffée.*"

This hint sufficed. My mythology completed the information. Mine was not the age of deduction, inference, or analysis ; and I accordingly laid aside the volume, murmuring to myself, " And I too will be a Circe !"

I wearied in a week or two of my school-room volumes. I had many hours of solitude at home, many in the carriage ; and, as Mademoiselle Joséphine and I appeared, as I have before remarked, to have entered into a tacit agreement to interfere as little as possible with each other, she made no comment when she saw me surrounded by books withdrawn from my mother's library. It were needless to do more than to observe that they were invariably novels and romances ; and that, through their medium, I soon began to comprehend more perfectly both my own position and that of my mother.

I remember that I threw aside Sir Charles Grandison in disgust. It appeared to me cold, formal, and tedious. I had no taste for the tender passion treated mathematically ; and I found many other works upon the same shelves which revenged me upon his monotony. From my first admittance to the drawing-room, I had heard the subject of love constantly discussed—my presence was unheeded ;

children are commonly overlooked at such moments ; and yet upon children nothing is lost. Several arguments and opinions, of which I had thus become an auditor, remained impressed upon my memory ; and now, when I began to reason and to reflect, they returned vividly to my recollection.

The example of my mother imprinted them on my heart.

CHAPTER XII.

Unhappily for myself, I was abandoned to this existence of perverted taste and unwholesome occupation for upwards of a long, weary year. At the close of the season, Lady Devereux, whose beauty was on the wane, and whose coquetry became only the more exacting in consequence, persuaded my mother to travel. My father's approbation was requested as a matter of form, and yielded as listlessly as it was asked. He could always establish a genial home at his club ; and he had, moreover, the good sense to feel that what must ultimately be conceded was better unopposed.

To Paris, accordingly, the party proceeded ; consisting of my mother, and her friend Lady Devereux, Sir Herbert, Lord Otterford, Frederic Vernon, and his sister. Thence they progressed to Rome, and ultimately to Sicily ; returning to winter in Paris, where the elegance and beauty of Lady Madelaine created an intense sensation at the French court. The pure, pale loveliness of Miss Vernon also produced its effect, but her health was undermined—

that precious health, to produce whose restoration her anxious mother had alone been prevailed upon to permit her absence; and her spirits were strangely depressed.

Nevertheless, as they travelled *en grands seigneurs*, and met with neither obstacle nor accident, the twelve months passed rapidly away; and the ladies returned to London for the season, renovated in health, and refulgent in fashion.

I had meanwhile, ere their re-appearance at Rooksley, entered my fourteenth year.

I have often since, after experiencing in myself the chances and changes of the world, looked back in wonder at the tenacity with which my mother's coterie held together. It is extremely probable that, were I aware of the personal motives and interests which conduced to this result, it might be no longer matter of marvel; but, with no other guide than my own bitter recollections, it is still to me a subject of unceasing wonder. True it is, that it was composed of individuals whose worldly position placed them beyond the hazard of requiring deep sympathy or serious assistance the one from the other. They were all butterflies, sporting in the sunshine of fortune. There was more matter than mind in the bond which held them together; and I have lived too long to place any reliance on the *soi-disant* friendship, which is

alimented by the popularity or the worldly qualities of its object. Let one party be exposed to the pressure of circumstances ; let health fail ; let necessities sicken the heart and depress the energies ; and, on the other side, let modish fools lisp lightly of a tie which they are unable to comprehend ; let new pursuits, new flatterers, and new prospects supervene, and what becomes of the sick, the sad, the suffering absentee ? There is still verbal pity — there is still lip-deep regret—where all good feeling is not utterly annihilated ; but there is also more than this. There is a *want*, there is a *necessity*, for the favourite of fortune, first to conceal, and ere long to throw off, these inconvenient feelings. The race of pleasure must be run ; the path must be made easy, and the journey light ; the shadow of another's sufferings breaks the comfortable and self-caressing progress of the better-dowered child of chance ; and it is accordingly swept aside, or passed by unheeded. Little think or reckon they whose chariots press forward in the race, of the overburthened hearts which they assist to break !

But, pshaw ! Complaint is not my purpose. I know the world. The lesson is, perchance, difficult to learn ; but, once well conned, it is one which is never forgotten ; and, after all, philosophy teaches us that we were born to trial ; while a better faith points to a still more valuable truth.

And now, let me revert to myself as I *was*.

A year and a half of desultory, and in many cases of pernicious, reading ; of partial solitude, broken only by still more ill-boding companionship, at a period of life when the mind works out its self-development, and searches eagerly for subjects of interest and excitement ; coupled with a disposition naturally precocious and observant ; had done its silent, but no less certain work upon me, mentally and morally ; nor had it failed to produce also its physical effect. I needed no prompter to whisper this. The looking-glass at which, on the departure of my mother, I could only satisfy myself of the propriety of my head-dress, now reflected my whole face ; nor was I, by any means, inclined to quarrel with the reflection. One of my favourite amusements was to compare my features with those of a magnificent full-length portrait of my mother, which was suspended above the mantel of the library ; and I was perfectly satisfied with the results of my scrutiny ; while my heart bounded, as I remembered, (thanks to Lady Madelaine's book-shelves !) that *my* triumph was but beginning, while *hers* would be, ere long, upon the wane ! Still, I was conscious that there was a charm, a spell, about my mother, wanting to my unformed and neglected girlhood ; and as I had treasured her looks, and tones, and caprices in my memory, I forthwith began to prac-

tise them to the great annoyance of Mademoiselle Joséphine and my maid. I was unable to appreciate her better qualities, and therefore they escaped me ; while I clung to her defects, with a tenacity which soon made them perfectly my own.

The next step was one which may appear exaggerated and unnatural. Let those who so esteem it reflect ere they affect to doubt ; for they can know little of a woman's nature. It is a common assertion that events have been pre-ordained—I had been *pre-educated*, in that most uncertain of all mysteries, the intricacies of the heart. And therefore—my next step was jealousy of the homage which my mother had hitherto engrossed. I had been often told of my beauty, of my grace, of my attractions, but it was in another tone. The child had been petted and pampered as a child ; but the vanity of the girl could no longer be satisfied with such questionable worship.

When I made my first appearance in the drawing-room, on the evening of my mother's return to Rooksey—for she had not previously found a leisure moment in which to receive me—I remarked that a look of vague wonder followed my steps as I crossed the floor ; but, as I felt that my appearance was unexceptionable, I consequently interpreted the sensation which I had created in a way well suited to gratify my vanity ; although it received a very

severe shock in the extreme coldness of my mother's recognition. She looked for a moment as though she really doubted my identity; and then a slight flush spread over her brow, and she turned her head aside, as if anxious to shut out an object that was disagreeable.

Resolved to follow up the effect which I had produced upon her circle, I had no sooner made the circuit of the room, and exchanged greetings with the guests, than I seated myself unbidden at the harp; and as this had been my favourite study, impelled as I was to exertion by a knowledge of the admiration which Lady Madelaine had always commanded when performing upon that showy and graceful instrument, my proficiency was, as I have reason to believe, something extraordinary; while it is probable that its effect was enhanced by the listless and unsettled mood of my hearers, who had not yet recovered the dissipations and exactions of London life.

Be that as it may, however, it is certain that exclamations of wonder and delight resounded on all sides; and that I engrossed, for full five minutes, the entire attention of the company. My father was not present. He was attending his parliamentary duties. It was well that I enjoyed my triumph freely and fully, for it was not destined to be soon repeated.

On the morrow, during the progress of my mother's toilette, Mademoiselle Joséphine was summoned to her dressing-room, to make a report of my mental and moral progress : and ten minutes afterwards I was myself bidden to the conference.

Assuredly, Lady Madelaine was very beautiful ; and on this particular occasion I was more than ever impressed by the fact. She was seated in a large lounging-chair, her fine hair falling in masses over her shoulders, her graceful figure loosely draped by the soft folds of a wrapping-gown of pale blue cashmere ; and the extremities of her small feet thrust into a pair of crimson velvet slippers, edged with swansdown. Immediately opposite, and reflecting the whole of her person, stood a cheval glass of immense proportions, set into a frame of or-molu ; upon which, after her first brief salutation on my entrance, the eyes of my mother were riveted with great complacency.

“ What is this, Miss Tilden, that I hear of you ? ” she exclaimed, with a harshness of which, had I ever reflected upon the subject, I should have considered her incapable ; “ Mademoiselle informs me that your vanity is so great, and so troublesome, that your maid has repeatedly complained of late both of your caprice and of your violence.”

“ Indeed ! ” I replied with all the composure that I could assume ; “ I was not aware that Mademoi-

selle considered it as a part of her duty to enter into the details of our late proceedings ; but, since such is the case, I may probably, on my side, be enabled to afford your ladyship some interesting information."

My mother was evidently petrified at my audacity, while the frown and the blush which simultaneously spread over the brow and cheeks of the conscious Frenchwoman turned her complexion purple. I kept my eye steadily fixed upon her : she knew that she was in my power ; and I never, thereafter, suffered her to overlook the fact.

"What is the meaning of this, Eveleen ?" asked my mother, after a momentary silence.

"Much, or nothing, as Mademoiselle Joséphine may consider best," I answered quietly.

"If you expect, Miss Tilden ;" pursued Lady Madelaine, evidently highly provoked, but endeavouring to conceal her annoyance ; "that I shall consent to waste my time upon your criminations and recriminations, I beg you at once to undeceive yourself. Thus much, however, I feel it my duty to remark—that, had Mademoiselle acted fearlessly and energetically, and as I had every right, from the recommendations upon which she was received into this family, to hope that she would have done—these complaints against my daughter never could have occurred."

No wonder that Félicie tossed her little head, and snuffed the air with an expression of virtuous indignation and outraged dignity, when she remembered that it was by her own unassisted cleverness that "*cette bête de Joséphine*" had been so pleasantly established.

"Vanity!" continued Lady Madelaine in a tone of contemptuous mockery, which, looking upon her at that moment, was quite an epigram; "can there be a more despicable, a more unworthy vice?—Félicie, I am really weary of telling you that I will *not* have my ringlets so massed together! Scatter them, in order that the lines of the forehead may be traced in profile; and do not let me have to remind you of this again.—Then I have been compelled to hear of your violence, Miss Tilden. Upon my word! Your education has progressed in less than two years, since you have learned within that period to strike your maid."

I own that I did now feel considerably ashamed. The rebuke which I had just received for my vanity rather amused than disconcerted me. My mother was off her guard: she forgot that I was two years older in time since we parted, and she had yet to learn that I was ten years older in knowledge of the world, or rather in that shrewd and active observation by which it is the most easily attained. The second charge brought against me was less easily

excused to my own heart. I was as proud as Lady Madelaine herself; and when my transgression was thus abruptly laid before me, there was a coarseness about it by which I was revolted.

Well had it been had my mother dismissed me at that moment, while a wholesome feeling of compunction planted a burning blush upon my cheek—well, alike for the respect which I owed to her, and for the effect produced upon my own character. But this was not to be. Lady Madelaine, who detested the exertion which she considered herself in this instance called upon to make, and who had evidently determined to avoid, if possible, all chance of its recurrence, had yet a few more “last words” to deliver; and I was still standing silently beside her, self-condemned and humbled in my own eyes, when Félicie, who was, unfortunately for herself, much more intent upon the conversation that was going on about her, than upon her own occupation, and who had just commenced operations on the other side of her lady’s ringlets, began once more to pile the glossy curls thickly together; when the taper fingers of the angry beauty suddenly wound themselves about the handle of the brush, and wresting it from her hand, flung it violently into her face, whence it bounded off, and falling upon a table on which stood a breakfast service of Nankin china, brought the cup and saucer about to be used by my

mother to the floor, where they lay scattered in fragments ; at the same instant, when Félicie, with a faint shriek, raised her black silk apron to her face, to stanch the blood which was flowing from her nose.

I remained for an instant aghast and motionless, and then I fear that, despite my better reason, I smiled. I imagine that I must have done so, for at that very moment, as the eyes of my mother and my own chanced to meet, I saw a cloud gather upon her brow. Her little hand instinctively clenched itself, and her slippered foot beat against the floor, as she exclaimed hurriedly ; “ Leave the room, Miss Tilden ! Have you not the good taste to leave the room ? ”

Had I been in the Presence, I could not have made a more punctilious curtsy than that with which I withdrew, followed by the shrinking and trembling Joséphine. I turned one look upon the unhappy delinquent, who was standing apart, crying bitterly with mingled pain and passion ; but I have no doubt that she was easily consoled, for I saw her on the following Sunday, glorious in a dress of violet lutestring, which I remembered to have once noticed upon my mother.

Need I say that no particularly high moral effect was produced upon me by the interview which had been so strangely terminated. I was no longer a

child—I felt my power. My own mother had shrunk from my observation. I forgot all that she had uttered, both in reproach and warning; but the action which had succeeded the words was, for months afterwards, still vividly before me. Example is a hundredfold more potent than precept upon the spirit of the young. When the hour came at which I had formerly been in the habit of joining my mother's circle, I was already deep in doubt between a dress of white muslin, and a frock of blue brocade, when Mademoiselle very sententially informed me that *Miladi* would dispense with my presence, and that I was not again to present myself *en société*, until I had received instructions to that effect.

A week before—even a day before—such a message would have made me furious; now, I received it with perfect calmness; and desiring that my maid would replace the rival dresses in my wardrobe, I flung myself upon a sofa, and was soon, to all appearance, deeply engaged in the last volume of Fielding's *Amelia*. I could see that my unquestioning resignation astonished both my governess and my waiting-woman; they exchanged glances of surprise which did not escape me, and which was just what I desired; but they had no sooner left me to myself than I laid aside the book, and began, as was now my invariable custom, to

search for the explanation of my mother's conduct. I asked myself why she, who had been formerly so blind to my faults, so demonstrative in her affection, so indulgent in her rule when I was a mere mindless child, should suddenly have become cold, repelling, and even harsh in her bearing, now that I had attained a more companionable age, and was more capable of appreciating kindness? The simple banishment from her immediate circle I could at once, and without difficulty, have attributed to her annoyance at my presence during the scene of the morning, and her anxiety that the impression should have time to become fainter ere we again met. I did not waste a moment upon that phase of the affair. It was the abrupt, uncompromising, dictatorial tone which she had assumed at that very interview, which struck me as incongruous and inexplicable. That she had listened to the complaints made against me, and to the circumstances which had called them forth, was evident from the spirit of her rebuke; but that she should not condescend to make some appeal to me, individually, and thus enable me to excuse or to justify myself, was the great subject of my bewilderment.

Had I not for years been encouraged and applauded, whenever I endeavoured to imitate her either in air or manner? Had I not been praised and petted when I succeeded in aping a tone or

a gesture with sufficient accuracy to ensure its immediate recognition? Had she not frequently chidden me for the disorder of a stray ringlet, or the discomposure of a ruffled flounce? Had I not received repeated injunctions not to spread the muscles of my hands, by attempting to grasp objects too large for them, and to be careful to tread evenly, lest I should spoil the turn of my ankle? Was not her parting command to Mademoiselle Joséphine connected with the preservation of my complexion? and were not all these cases so many incentives to vanity? My reason answered "Yes;" and I felt that herein at least I was entitled to the highest commendation for my implicit and unvarying obedience.

I walked to the glass. There could be no doubt that on this point my mother had every reason to be satisfied. She had given me a text, and I had composed a whole volume upon that single sentence. There could be no doubt, I say, upon the subject. I was decidedly a beauty, and it was beauty of a very high order. I tried my head in several positions, and it came triumphantly through every ordeal. I was tall, too; I felt it was extremely probable that in two years more I should be as tall as Lady Madelaine herself; and in two years I should be sixteen. How many of my most cherished heroines had been fenced in by lovers at

sixteen ! I wondered whether this fact had ever struck her ; she must have known it, for I learnt it from her own books.

Decidedly she could not have been disappointed with my appearance. Wherein then could lie the cause of my disgrace ? I was satisfied that my masters would report well of my progress, one and all ; and, indeed, I had already afforded to Lady Madelaine herself the opportunity of estimating my musical proficiency. I had excited not only attention, but even astonishment. Here again I was consequently blameless. I could find no clue to the enigma.

CHAPTER XIII.

On one point I was, at the close of my deliberations, absolutely determined ; and this was to endure the maternal caprice, for simply as such did I consider it, in dignified silence. I would not condescend to complain. I was no longer a child to be chidden without a cause. In two years I should be sixteen, and there was to me impunity and emancipation in the very thought.

As I resolved, so I acted. That I suffered deeply I will not deny ; for greedy of admiration, and accustomed to indulgence, I could not think of the brilliant circle collected in the other wing of the house, without severe mortification ; but I suffered in silence. I did not relax a tittle in my application to the various accomplishments which formed my studies. I pursued my reading with the same avidity as ever ; but I was now driven to the general library, for I dared no longer invade

the bookshelves of Lady Madelaine. I found, however, an ample store of fiction even there, although, fortunately for me, it was of a higher class. Still, I had many unoccupied moments, and these were invariably employed in speculating upon my mother's extraordinary change of feeling; and in building some very magnificent "castles in the air," of which I was one day to become the tenant.

Things remained in this position for a fortnight, at the end of which time my father arrived from town; and with this information was coupled the command of Lady Madelaine, that I should take my coffee, as I had formerly done, in the drawing-room. I obeyed with the same composure as on the occasion of my banishment. In vain did Mademoiselle, who condescended to superintend my toilette, endeavour to elicit from me some expression of surprise or curiosity; for, although I studiously tried the patience both of herself and my attendant, and three times changed my dress when they supposed me ready to join my mother's guests, not a syllable did I suffer to escape my lips upon the subject which actually engrossed my mind. At length their toil was over. I confessed myself satisfied—gave a last look at the glass—arranged a stray hair—and descended to the drawing-room, if not with the same feeling, at least with the same

appearance of composure as though I had never been exiled from its gaieties.

As I anticipated, my father was the first who greeted me on my entrance. Absorbed by public business, as my mother had been by pleasure ; and, moreover, with little cause to hope that my companionship would repay him for personal inconvenience, he had never once visited Rooksley during the whole period of her absence ; and I observed that he appeared no less struck by the change in my person than Lady Madelaine and her friends had been upon the former occasion ; but his surprise was evidently pleasurable. There was a proud expression in his eyes as they lingered upon my face, and a deep tenderness in the tone with which he addressed me ; nor was I slow to remark that, mingled with that tenderness, there was a courteous deference of manner, of which a really high-bred man can never divest himself when conversing with a woman, but which I had never before observed in him when speaking to myself.

The conviction gave me courage. “ In my father’s eyes I am no longer a child ! ” I whispered proudly to my own heart ; and, after having lingered for a moment at his side, I slowly approached the lounging-chair of Lady Madelaine, without looking either to the right or left, but making my way with all the grace and self-possession of which I was

capable. When I stood before her, my mother gave me a slight nod, and a faint smile, just what would have been a graceful and becoming acknowledgment of my propriety of bearing, had we only parted an hour or two previously : and who, save myself, was aware that it was not so ?

• This ceremony over, I found my hand clasped in that of Miss Vernon, who, drawing me aside, began eagerly to explain that Lady Madelaine had peremptorily forbidden all invasion of the school-room, or that she should have shared my solitude frequently, very frequently. I thanked her with a beaming smile and a heightened colour ; but it was not her affectionate address which had elicited either the one or the other. At the very moment that she was speaking, I heard the voice of Sir James Dornton, who exclaimed, in an accent loud enough to reach my ear—

“ Can it be possible that the beautiful girl I see yonder is Miss Tilden !—the little Eveleen of a few months ago ! Egad, in a year or two my Lady Madelaine herself must look to her laurels.”

I had never thought the fastidious baronet half so agreeable ; and was glad when he soon afterwards approached me, and I found that he had just arrived from town with my father.

“ We travelled *en tiers*, Miss Tilden,” he said, affecting intense disgust ; “ which is what no one

should do who is not prepared to risk all the consequences, however fatal ; and this alarming fact I considerately laid before your senatorial papa ; but he gave no heed to my remonstrance ; and accordingly, after we had each possessed ourselves of a corner of the chariot, the process was completed by the application of a human wedge in the shape of that tall young gentleman, who is now lounging against the mantelpiece, and staring most impertinently into the face of a young lady with whom I have the honour of being in conversation."

I instinctively looked in the direction which he indicated ; and as I did so, even rapidly as he withdrew his gaze, my eyes met those of the stranger for an instant. I had never before seen such eyes ; so large, so dark, and so soft in their expression. Tall, and slight, but with an air of fashion, and a gracefulness of attitude which appeared to realize all the fabled perfection of the heroes of my imagination, I saw at the first glance that the new guest was a mere stripling ; but I dared not pursue my scrutiny : and the pause was consequently brief, which I terminated by inquiring his identity.

"That very fortunate young gentleman," said Sir James, "is the only child of your mother's pet friend, Lady Devereux—*que voilà*, showing her pretty foot to the insensible Frederic Vernon—and

he is consequently the sole heir of Sir Herbert, who, I have been confidently assured, loves him almost as well as his favourite hunter. Think of that, Miss Tilden ! and emulate his perfections. The *joli garçon* has just left college ; and as his lady-mother is of opinion that black and scarlet blend very harmoniously, she has coaxed his unwilling papa—whose principal study is, as you are probably aware, how to do the least possible good in the longest possible time : or, perhaps, I should rather say, to live out his life without doing anything—to allow her darling to go into the Guards ; and, such as you see him, he is actually and *bona fide*, at this moment, one of the defenders of his country, and has run down to Rooksley to ‘kiss hands’ on the momentous occasion.”

“ He appears to be very young,” I hazarded in reply.

“ He completed his seventeenth year a day or two since ; but you must venture no remark upon his juvenility ; Horse-Guardsmen of that age being wonderfully punctilious on the matter of their manliness.”

The words were scarcely uttered when my father, followed by young Devereux, advanced to the sofa, upon which we were seated, when the subject of our conversation was made known to me ; and Sir James, with a sarcastic ceremony, for which at the

moment I detested him, rose, and resigned his place beside me to the stranger, who, however, possessed himself of it with a composure and good faith which soon restored my complacency.

I felt as though I now saw one of my favourite novels in action, and that I was to become the heroine of a plot full of romance and interest. I required no prompting to teach me that he admired my person; and I had been too long prepared for a similar event, to be found wanting in the attempt to display my perfections in the most favourable light. I closed my eyes languidly, after the fashion of my mother: and when the long lashes had produced their effect, I raised them suddenly to the face of my companion, only to avert them in the same haste. My triumph was great as I remarked his growing interest. He was evidently unsuspecting of artifice; and as all my mother's lady-guests were absorbed in their own peculiar partialities and avocations, no comment was made upon the fact of our continuing in conversation throughout the evening, and parting only when Mademoiselle entered to reclaim what she was pleased to call her *pupil*.

As my father's public duties would not permit of his remaining long absent from town, it was intimated to me, that, with the exception of those hours which were habitually dedicated to my several

masters, my time and movements were at my own disposal. I had suddenly attained to happiness ! I was free to come and to go. I was beloved—this, above all, was the thought which gave a new charm to my existence ; nor did I suffer myself to doubt that it must be so. It is true, that at the end of a week I began to have some misgivings of the progress of the devoted attachment of which I was resolved to become the object. Engrossed by my own vanity, the idea of the conquest which I had made was ever present to me ; nor could I force myself to feel an interest in any other subject. I did not reflect that it was far otherwise with young Devereux. He might admire me, as a pretty girl, and find a pleasure in conversing with one who treated his sentiments and attentions with respect ; but he had also other contemplations even more agreeable. He had just escaped the trammels of college, and taken a decided and honourable position in society. Bright visions of the future mingled, therefore, with his enjoyment of the present ; and it is probable that long after I argued myself into the belief that I held his happiness in my hands, the placid reveries in which he loved to indulge were full of gold lace and thorough-bred chargers, instead of bright eyes and well-turned ancles.

This coldness did not, however, long continue.

He was dazzled by the showiness of my accomplishments, flattered by the pleasure which I did not attempt to conceal when we met, and surrounded by an atmosphere redolent of gallantry and dissipation. Nevertheless, Herbert Devereux was a greater novice than myself in the language of admiration. Timid, wholly unconscious of his personal advantages, and deeply imbued with respect for the sex, he was guarded in every word and look. He lived in perpetual fear of offending, and took alarm, more than once, at the very means which I adopted to give him confidence. Time and opportunity, however, were my best allies. My father returned to town, leaving the young soldier quietly domesticated under his roof: and thus the only watchful and wary eye which might have detected our childish folly was withdrawn.

Sir James Dornton was the first person who directed attention to the precocious flirtation in which we were engaged; but, as he did so in merry mockery rather than in prudent warning, it was acknowledged only to become the new amusement of the circle. They even jested with us on the subject. They were wrong. These boy and girl attachments frequently lead to more serious results than is imagined by those who look on them in sport.

Lady Devereux alone never appeared to remark

our growing fancy. It was her policy to affect perfect indifference and contempt of so extremely improbable an idea. It is certain that even her only son would have had some difficulty in making a more judicious marriage, in a worldly point of view. So, while Lord Otterford jested with my mother upon the prepossession of his young cousin, and revolted against the threat of my renewed banishment from the drawing-room, Lady Devereux pursued the even tenour of her way, leaving events to dispose of themselves.

My mother, always self-absorbed, and unwilling to contend with her devoted admirer upon so very immaterial a subject, left us in peace, and soon ceased altogether to remark our proceedings. Many romantic hours did we spend upon the lake ; across which Herbert Devereux used to row until the boat was fairly hidden among the willow-boughs which fringed the island that intervened between them and the house. Here, with one of my favourite books, all which were new to my companion, or with my guitar, which he played to admiration, we spent long hours, during the riding excursions of Lady Madelaine's party ; while the park afforded walks sufficiently secluded to satisfy even my exacting spirit of romance. At length Herbert told me that he loved me. Tall in stature, and perfectly self-possessed in manner, he had soon for-

gotten that I was still a mere girl; nor did I, on my side, pause to remember the fact. My day-dream was accomplished. I stood on the same level with my mother; and when the elegant strip-ling raised my hand to his lips, and prayed me to pardon the avowal, I was violently agitated. It was the first great triumph of my vanity, and I felt as though earth could thereafter hold no evil destiny for me.

My emotion gave me new charms in the eyes of my young admirer. He was too unworldly to suspect its source; nor was it a confidence which I felt called upon to make; but from that hour I was conscious of my power, and resolved to exert it.

An incident which shortly afterwards occurred, nevertheless, changed materially, not only my feelings of self-reliance, but the actual tenour of my life.

Lady Madelaine had received from a friend in India a fan of carved ivory of magnificent workmanship. The Glenfillan arms, her own cipher, and other appropriate ornaments, were wrought upon it, with a delicacy and finish which rendered it of extreme value, especially to Lady Madelaine herself.

This fan she one evening chanced to mislay, nor could any of the servants succeed in finding it. A search by the guests ensued the following morning,

after luncheon; and while each was engaged in disarranging some article of furniture in the saloon, under the plea of seeking for the lost fan, I passed on into the octagon room, followed by Herbert Devereux.

As I was really anxious for the recovery of the pretty toy, I did not remark the circumstance; but approaching a sofa which stood in a recess, I at once began to displace the cushions, when I suddenly felt an arm folded about my waist, and a warm lip pressed to my cheek. I started, and turned round. My woman-instinct had at once told me who was the aggressor; but I had no time to chide, for in the doorway also stood my mother, with her dark and angry eyes riveted upon us.

Herbert drew back in evident consternation—it was the first time that he had dared so much, and he was cowed at the effects of his audacity. My own heart beat violently, and I felt the hot blood mantling over my brow; but I stood my ground. The after-conduct of my mother, however, for a time humbled and disconcerted me. She softly closed the door behind her, and pushed the bolt; and, this done, she seated herself haughtily upon the sofa, and turned towards young Devereux, who supported himself, as he stood, against a chair.

“I have intruded upon you at an unfortunate moment, Mr. Devereux;” she said coldly; “but

you must pardon me. This child is my daughter, and with her I shall know how to deal. With regard to yourself, you must pardon me once more, if I say that you had better, without more delay, enter upon your military duties."

"Miss Tilden is blameless, madam—" commenced the agitated young man, hurriedly.

"Of course she is—she is *my* daughter, sir;" interrupted Lady Madelaine, in the same tone of forced composure as before; "she has not yet escaped from the nursery, and is consequently quite unable to take care of herself. I will henceforth be cautious that she shall not require to do so. The mail passes through Rooksley to-night; and perhaps you would now like to go, and take leave of your mother."

Devereux was thunderstruck. He made another attempt to obtain a hearing; but Lady Madelaine was inexorable.

"Enough, enough;" she said impetuously; "you to your parade-ground, and this child to her school-room. All argument is useless."

Overpowered by her manner, Herbert bowed profoundly, turned one long, supplicating look towards me, as though to crave my pardon for the displeasure which he had brought upon me, and shooting back the bolt, slowly left the room.

"You have commenced early, Miss Tilden;" was

the sarcastic observation of my mother when he had disappeared ; “ your education has indeed progressed far beyond my expectations, and you are likely to do honour to your father’s name. These are then the creditable results of the vanity which I sought in vain to curb ! Do you not remember how seriously I expostulated with you upon this subject not a month since ? ”

“ I do, madam ; ” I replied, with a courage which it astonishes me even now to look back upon. “ Your ladyship rebuked me, both for my vanity and for my violence. I am not likely to forget the circumstance ; nor, from my own experience, to doubt the correctness of the Italian proverb, which says, ‘ *Come canta il capallano, cosè risponde il sacristan.* ’ ”

“ Ha ! you attempt also to speak in epigrams, ” exclaimed Lady Madelaine, intensely provoked ; “ truly you are a precocious young lady, and cannot fail to be one day a credit to your family ! How long, may I venture to inquire, have these familiarities been permitted between yourself and Mr. Devereux ? ”

I was silent.

“ It is not your pleasure to satisfy me upon this point. Perhaps you are right. I shall at least know when they terminated for ever. And now, listen to me, Miss Tilden. I have, as you are

aware, lately purchased a villa upon the Thames. Thither I shall remove, with my guests, in the course of a few days. You will remain here; not under the guidance of a weak and too indulgent governess, but under strict and stringent guardianship. I have condescended to explain this, because I shall never again permit myself to hold any conversation with you on the subject."

"And my father —" I asked proudly; "is your ladyship well assured that he will sanction the imprisonment of a daughter whom he loves?"

"The experiment shall be tried;" answered my mother coldly. "I am, at all events, well provided with reasons for the step which I am about to take; nor do I believe that Mr. Tilden will be insensible to the disgrace which has already been brought upon him by your levity."

"Disgrace!" I exclaimed recklessly; "I deny that I have in any way disgraced my father. My fault, it fault it be, was involuntary. I was not even aware of Mr. Devereux's presence. I will not be denounced to my father as having forgotten the respect I owe to myself."

"You will not, Miss Tilden!"

"I will not, madam. It was the first occasion upon which Lady Devereux's son had done more than kiss my hand. I trust that he did not err in so mere a trifle as that salutation, and that I am

not to blame in having permitted it. Should it be otherwise, your ladyship will forgive me if I once more recall the Italian proverb."

For the moment, I knew that my mother was in my power; there was no escape from the room, as I have before mentioned, save through the saloon in which the guests were now assembled; not did she dare to raise her voice, lest the sounds of altercation should attract their notice; and it was doubtlessly the knowledge that such was the case which inspired me with a temporary daring, ill-suited alike to my age and to our relative position.

For a brief interval, Lady Madelaine exhibited, however, no inclination to reply. She was petrified by my insolence. She little knew or guessed the education which her own neglect and baneful example had combined to work out, in a nature as confident and as self-willed as her own. I feared her still; but, girl as I was, I had almost ceased to respect her. I was aware of her power; but I was also quite as cognizant of her weakness.

"This to me!" she at length gasped out, with an eye that flamed with indignant anger, and in a suppressed voice which vainly struggled to be calm; "Is this the return which you make for my indulgence? Eveleen, Eveleen, I never anticipated this. Do you presume to measure your own conduct—the conduct of a mere child—by that of those

about you ? It is indeed time that the viper should be crushed. I shall waste no more words ; you are unworthy of them. Follow me."

She rose, drew up her stately figure to its full height, and disappeared into the saloon, leaving the door of communication open. I stood for an instant irresolute. My pride revolted at the possibility of being subjected to the ridicule of the assembled guests, should my mother deem it expedient to betray the unguarded action of Herbert ; while I shrank with almost equal repugnance from the idea that I might be dismissed to my room like a chidden child, after having played the part of a woman before her circle. Suddenly a thought flashed upon me. The window, which was pierced nearly to the ground, stood invitingly open. I laid my hand upon the frame, and sprang out. The sounds of laughter reached me from the drawing-room ; and my brow burnt as I figured to myself that I was, in all probability, the object of the ridicule. I, so proud, so vain, and so self-centred.—The pang was terrible ! For a time I had not courage to escape from the odious merriment, but supported myself against the wall of the house, and listened with an intensity which seemed to absorb all the faculties of my being ; this state of emotion was, however, too violent to last. I had already maintained a severe struggle with myself, in order to preserve an ap-

pearance of composure before my mother ; and this last trial was almost more than I could support. After a short pause, therefore, I rushed away into the wood which skirted the lawn, where I was alone with my own feelings, with no eye upon me ; and where the voice of ridicule and sarcasm could not meet my ear.

I threw myself down under a tree, and tried to think ; but I could not. Every pulse throbbed almost to bursting, and the pain in my head was intolerable. I clasped my forehead with my spread hands, and wept—tears of passionate energy, such as were ill-suited to my years. I felt that I had been harshly used—that I had been rebuked for errors similar to those which were hourly passing before my eyes—that all opportunity of justification had been coldly denied to me. I experienced no remorse for the mortification which I had entailed upon my mother ; but rather, on the contrary, believed myself worthy of praise, for the generous forbearance which had induced me to conceal from her the interview of Emily Vernon and Lord Otterford on the very spot which she had so lately occupied as an inexorable judge. I understood her sufficiently to know that by such a revelation she would have been humbled to the dust, however successfully she might have struggled to conceal it. I might have done this, and did not ; and by a

strange anomaly of feeling, perfectly incomprehensible to myself, I rejoiced that it was so. It was the one consolatory point of my reflections, when at length I was enabled to reflect ; and the cool night-air and the deep stillness had, ere long, so beneficial an effect upon my nerves, that I arose in a state of comparative calm ; and, slowly retracing my steps to the house, proceeded at once to my own room ; where, ringing for my maid, I retired immediately to rest, on the plea of sudden indisposition.

Did I say to rest ? It was a mere profanation of the word. I could not close my eyes ; and now that I had in a great degree overcome the effects of my interview with my mother, my thoughts reverted to Herbert ; and a burning blush overspread my cheeks as I remembered that I had been treated in his presence as a froward child, who needed chastisement. He was about to depart, too ; to mingle with the world of which I believed and feared that he would soon become the idol ; he might forget me, or remember me ere long only in the odious character which it had pleased Lady Madeleine to attribute to me ; and this was the most bitter thought of all.

I found some consolation, however, in dwelling upon the changed manner of all the men who formed my mother's circle. They, at least, it was

sufficiently evident, had ceased to regard me in the same light as Lady Madelaine. Foremost among those who had admitted my claim to be otherwise considered was Sir James Dornton; and I did not seek to restrain a feeling of triumph when I remembered this.

Perhaps I could not choose a more fitting place in which to describe the said baronet; who played so prominent a part in the history of my after-life, that it is necessary to introduce him formally to the reader.

CHAPTER XIV.

Sir James Dornton, one of the most important persons in my history, was of a family more ancient than illustrious. His fortune was greatly inferior to his ambition ; and he valued money, as those universally do value it whose habits of personal luxury bear no proportion to the capability of its indulgence. I need scarcely remark, however, that this undignified passion was carefully concealed. Sir James was as proud as he was poor. He was one of those men of fashion, some of whom are encountered every day, who have the tact of passing off their counterfeit as current coin, without suffering the penalty of the law for their social forgery. Nature had done everything for him physically, but had been extremely economical in her dowry of virtue. He was tall and graceful ; with a fine and expressive countenance ; remarkably quick at repartee ; and, like all persons who care not, when they launch their arrows,

whom they may ultimately wound so long as their flight attracts attention, he passed for a man of wit. Feeling he had none, save for his own comfort and convenience ; and his principle was as accommodating as his sentiment. Affecting a hyper-fastidiousness which exonerated himself from criticism, and was used as a blind for his occasional insolence to those around him ; gifted with extraordinary fluency, and a retentive memory ; polite and fascinating in his more amiable moments ; uncompromising and decided in those of greater importance ; and singularly handsome ; Sir James Dornton was the *enfant chéri* of his set ; a welcome visitor to the gay and the idle ; and celebrated among the dissipated as a *safe friend*—which means, that in keeping his own secrets, which he was always clever enough to do, he at the same time kept theirs. There can be no doubt that there is a certain degree of talent in being able to do this.

I need scarcely say, that this is not the portrait which I should have drawn of the baronet at fourteen ; it is the production of a more practised and familiar pencil.

And now—*revenons à nos moutons*.

My reverie was long and earnest ; but I still failed to discover the actual motives of my mother's conduct ; and I consequently, after a considerable time, turned from the speculative to the actual

position which I now occupied. I was once more to be abandoned to the solitude of Rooksley. The first use to which Lady Madelaine proposed to convert her river-villa, was that of ridding her of the obtrusive presence of a daughter who had gradually become distasteful to her. Mademoiselle Joséphine was to be discarded from the school-room. This, at least, was a relief; it was the only point of light in the picture. The Frenchwoman was peculiarly disagreeable to me—she was the most contemptible of all things—a cipher; a creature at once aimless and heartless, whom it was a waste of feeling even to despise; and I very soon satisfied myself that I should eminently prefer the “strict and stringent guardianship” with which I was threatened, let it come in what shape it might. My present implied subserviency to a discarded lady’s-maid was ignoble; there would be some glory, at least, in contention, if contend I must, against a superior intellect, and a less equivocal authority.

I can look back now upon this haughty reasoning with a smile, when I remember the result; but at the time it afforded my only consolation.

The threat of Lady Madelaine was by no means an idle one. Her removal to Putney followed within a month; and Rooksley was bereft of many of its more costly ornaments for the decoration of

the new villa. Nor was this all. There were signs, impossible to be misunderstood, which convinced me, without a hint from others, that she did not look forward to a speedy return. So much, indeed, was done, or rather undone, that the mansion ere long assumed the appearance of a religious house, rather than the abode of luxury which it had lately been. I confess that this fact wounded me deeply. The elegancies by which I had been surrounded from my childhood had become necessary to me. I worshipped the graceful and the beautiful. They were essential to my comfort. My mother was already revenged !

How often did I laugh in the bitterness of my spirit, as I walked hurriedly about the noble park, seeking in violent exertion to still the uncomfortable feelings by which I was haunted, when I remembered that here at least Lady Madelaine had been unable to separate me from the loveliness I so much prized. My father's apartments alone remained intact. The genius of desolation had not invaded their precincts ; and there I consequently spent a great portion of my time.

As the idea of my mother was always painful to me, present itself in what shape it might, I began to turn with more interest than I had ever hitherto felt, to that of my father ; and to examine carefully and earnestly every object which could afford an

insight into his habits and feelings. The more I studied the subject, the more I recalled his early caresses, his subdued tones, his tender indulgence ; and coupled with these the many evidences of his fine taste and cultivated mind by which I was now surrounded, the more deeply I felt that I had never returned his affection as I ought. I had just discovered the delight of being beloved ; and therefore I, for the first time, rightly understood the bitter feelings with which he must have seen his tenderness rejected. This conviction carried me far, very far ; for I instinctively travelled from my own want of sympathy to that of my mother. *Et tu, Brute !* was the aspiration of my heart. Yes—it was even so—the wife of his bosom did not appreciate his worth. The holy shrine of home, which should have been wreathed with blossoms, was heaped with ice ; and the only garlands by which it was rendered attractive were beaten out of cold and sordid gold.

Involuntarily my thoughts glanced towards Otterford ; and my breath came thick as I remembered that his bland hypocrisy and unmeaning gallantries had turned away the eyes and heart of my mother from the higher and more noble qualities of the man on whom she had bestowed her hand.

Amid these uneasy and conflicting reveries time

wore slowly on. Despite the new rule to which I had been informed that I was about to become subject, no alteration had as yet been made in the household, with the sole exception that Mademoiselle Joséphine had laid aside even the affectation of supremacy, and had quietly degenerated into a sullen and very inexperienced attendant; while I could trace an expression of triumph in the manner of the bustling Mrs. Harris, in our occasional encounters, evidently intended to provoke inquiry. Such condescension was, however, foreign to my character. Lady Madelaine had made the communications which she deemed expedient, and I neither sought nor cared for any others.

Of my own fate I was still comparatively careless—my leading anxiety was my present position with Herbert Devereux. Could I have been fully assured of the continuance of his affection, I might have put even my mortified vanity to rest. Had we been separated with some degree of delicacy and consideration, I might, at least, have looked back in calm and dignified sorrow to our parting; but now its memory revolted me. I had been placed in a position for which the whole course of my extensive reading offered no precedent. I had been humbled in the eyes of my first lover!—and, let those laugh who list, this was no slight trial to a budding beauty, looking forward

to her fifteenth year. When not overwhelmed by this recollection, I occupied myself in speculating upon the possible renewal of my father's affection. I was more conscious, day by day, of the value of the friend whom I had lost; and I became comparatively anxious to make some attempt to reillumine his extinguished tenderness. Alas! such a blessing was not destined to me—his heart had been for years a closed casket, of which he had flung away the key. Kind, and gentle, and indulgent, he could still be, for these endearing qualities were natural to him; but they grew no longer out of the deep feelings of a husband and a father.

Mr. Tilden in his own house resembled a stately forest-tree planted in a conservatory, and he sickened at the unwholesomeness of the atmosphere.

It was the beginning of autumn; Mrs. Vernon was still detained in town; and it had been determined that her daughter should remain there also throughout the winter, in order that she might secure the best advice for what the Galen of Rookley had decided to be a confirmed chest-complaint. Mrs. Alexander and her daughters were sojourning at Cheltenham; and of all my mother's habitual circle, no one remained in the neighbourhood save Lady O'Halloran and Dr. James.

I had been accustomed to hear her portly lady-

ship so slightly mentioned when she chanced to be absent; to hear both her physical and moral attributes so freely and wittily discussed; and to look upon her so decidedly as a person rather tolerated than desired, that I confess it was with a feeling very far from pleasurable that I heard her name one day announced, and thus saw my solitude for the first time invaded.

It was immediately evident that she perceived the impression produced by her presence, but she was too generous to show any resentment.

“ You are surprised to see me, Miss Tilden;” she said kindly, as she extended her hand; “ nor should I have intruded at Rooksley contrary to the express request of Lady Madelaine, had it not been at the desire of your excellent father.”

This assurance changed at once the whole current of my feelings: I both looked and expressed my acknowledgments.

“ I thought you also were absent from the neighbourhood;” I said in conclusion; “ for I was not aware of my mother’s prohibition; and believed it probable, that had any of her friends been within reach, they would have taken pity on the poor prisoner.”

“ No, my dear young lady;” said my visitor with a smile; “ I am content to remain at home throughout the year, when necessity does not call

me to town. I have a holier and a better use for the little I can spare, than squandering it in folly and in dress. Not, however," she added hastily, with a delicacy which did her honour, "that I blame those who enter into the gaieties of a London life, or who find pleasure in change of scene; in all probability, I should have done both under different circumstances. And now, my dear girl, what can I do to be either useful or agreeable to you?"

For a moment I did not reply, for the language of Lady O'Halloran was new to me. I had been so accustomed to consider that, as a matter of course, all persons of a *certain* condition in life had gold at command, and that to declare yourself poor was to acknowledge your own want of *caste* and consequence, that I was thunderstruck. I recovered myself, however, on the instant; and warmly thanking my visitor for her kind intentions in my favour, I requested her, in the first place, to give me tidings of my father.

"Mr. Tilden is doubtlessly quite well;" she said; "for he writes nothing on the subject of his health, which is always to me, at least, conclusive. We are all so apt to dwell upon our little ailments, both of body and spirit; and it does us so much good to prose where we feel sure to meet with sympathy, that I do not think, had anything been

amiss, he would have suffered so excellent an opportunity to escape ; whereas his whole letter is filled with anxiety for your happiness and comfort, which he seems to fear will both suffer from the contemplated arrangement. He tells me that you have never seen either your sister or your aunt ; and therefore it was that he encouraged me to break through the ban of excommunication, thinking that a familiar face, even though it should be that of an old woman, may occasionally afford you pleasure."

" My sister ! my aunt !" I exclaimed breathlessly ; " what can you possibly mean ? I entreat of you, my dear Lady O'Halloran, to explain yourself."

It was now my guest's turn to feel surprise—she looked at me with an expression of wondering pity. " Can it really be, my poor child," she said at length, after a pause which to me appeared interminable, " that you have been kept in ignorance of Lady Madelaine's intention ?"

" I know nothing ;" I answered bitterly ; " save that I am forsaken and disliked—that I have become an alien from my mother's heart."

Lady O'Halloran drew her chair closer to mine, and gently took my hand. " Do not suffer yourself to believe so ;" she said gravely ; " such morbid fancies will only serve to render your own life

miserable, while they can affect no one but yourself. To your father you are an object of deep and sincere interest ; but, young as you are, you must already be aware that he is not demonstrative in his feelings. That your mother is at present exasperated against you there can be no doubt ; while, however, it is quite as certain that the feeling will soon pass by. I know by experience," she continued, with a sigh, " that no mother can long retain displeasure against her child."

" But my father, Lady O'Halloran—may I not ask somewhat of him? You spoke, too, of my aunt—of my sister. Did I, could I indeed understand that they are coming here?"

" I feared that they would already have preceded me ;" she replied calmly ; " and I entreat you to remember, my dear girl, that one is your own sister, and the other the sister of your mother."

" I, indeed, require to bear this in mind ;" I remarked with increased bitterness ; " I now understand all the extent of Lady Madelaine's diplomacy. In my childhood I was petted and caressed—I was encouraged in every caprice and in every folly—I was made the idol not only of others, but of myself also, in order that the reverse should be more deeply felt. You talk of the feelings of a mother, Lady O'Halloran ; you talk as I have read of

them in books ; you do not understand the nature of Lady Madelaine Tilden."

" I implore you to speak no longer in such a strain, or you will banish me the house ;" said my visitor, shrinking beneath the violent passion which I displayed. " It is quite true that you were prematurely dragged from the nursery, and made to play a part utterly unsuited to your years, to the great regret of all who cared to speculate on the results of such a system ; but this was merely for the gratification of a whim. You are now too old to be made a toy ; and your mother, on discovering her error, has, probably, in her haste to repair it, exceeded somewhat in severity. But you are still very young, my dear Miss Tilden ; and, should you resolve to exert your good sense, and meet the new inmates of Rooksley in a feeling of welcome and relationship, it will be but a passing trial, which will ultimately tend to enhance the pleasures of that world to which you must necessarily return in a short time. Besides,—reflect only for a moment. *Shall* you experience no delight in holding to your heart a younger sister, ready to love you, and to cling to you for companionship and sympathy ? Remember the long and tedious banishment which this unoffending sister has already undergone, while you have been lapped in luxury, and cradled in indulgence."

I laughed scornfully, as I recalled to mind all the comments which I had heard made in the nursery on the young lady whose cause my zealous visitor was advocating.

“ Listen to me for a moment, Lady O’Halloran :” I said as quietly as though I were arguing a mere abstract question ; “ you are evidently labouring in the dark. Have you ever heard Lady Madelaine Tilden mention her younger child ?”

“ Never ; but your father—”

I waved my hand impatiently.

“ Shall I tell you why ? Her advent into this world nearly cost the life of her mother. Was this no crime ? That mother’s recovery was slow, and precarious. Was this no sin ? ay, and sin past all forgiveness, in the eyes of an acknowledged beauty, whose triumph was dependent upon time. The child, sickly from its birth, was fretful, and plain, and gave no promise of physical perfection. Did not this fact exonerate a fashionable parent from all natural ties ? Of course—of course. All the world knew that the beautiful Lady Madelaine Tilden had given birth to a second daughter, whom she had thrust forth in her infancy, because — But shame upon me !” I continued contemptuously ; “ I was about to give a reason for the act ; and why should I ? Throughout the world which she worshipped, none sought to ask one of the

Lady Madelaine; nor did she win a smile the less."

"Calm yourself, my dear child, I beseech you," murmured the astonished Lady O'Halloran.

"Have no fear for me, madam;" I said proudly; "you have been kind enough to express a wish to serve me, and I will be frank with you. You shall not lavish your civility upon an ingrate. I have been disciplined in a strange school; and would fain convince you that I have learned to judge for myself. I have told you what is Miss Adela Tilden's relative situation with her mother; now learn what it is towards myself. Physically, her worldly career must be a blank, for she is totally devoid of personal attractions. Of her education you will, at once, be enabled to form a correct idea, when I tell you that, since the death of Lord Glenfillan, my maternal grandfather, the Lady Flora, at once his daughter and my sister's guardian, has resided in the heart of the Highlands, with no other assistance in forming the mind and manners of her young ward than what could be afforded by a widow lady of good family and slender means, who chanced to have buried herself in the neighbourhood; and who was happy to embrace any method of increasing her inadequate income. In addition to these circumstances, I pray you also to remember, that my own fortune will, in all probability, be diminished, one

half by the existence of a sister so little calculated to do honour, either to herself or to her family, in those circles where it is essential that she should shine ; and then I think that you will readily exonerate me in your heart for any repugnance which I may testify to her close companionship. At present we are utter strangers ; mere matter of tradition the one to the other ; and this is as it should be. Why disturb so simple an arrangement ? When I was first told that I had a sister, my heart bounded to meet her ; but I was rebuked and ridiculed for the impulse. I have been tutored into indifference—it may be, into something more. I ask only to be left as circumstances have made me.”

“ You wrong your nature by such an argument, my dear girl :” said my good-natured visitor ; “ these are prejudices which have been instilled by those around you ; they cannot be the growth of your own mind, for they belong neither to your age, your sex, nor your disposition. You are, and have always been, essentially companionless ; for I cannot consider your tolerated appearance among your mother’s guests as society to one of your tender years. Reflect only how beautiful a bond is that which unites two sisters ; especially when, as in your case, the two are alone to love each other ; and believe me when I tell you

that a very few weeks of close and affectionate communion will suffice to convince you that your present feelings are both erroneous and ungenerous."

"Have you the same, or as efficient consolation to offer as regards the Lady Flora Glenfillan, madam?" I asked, with a smile compounded of scorn and melancholy.

"In her case, my dear, I can say nothing;" was the frank reply; "for, as I never had the honour of meeting the sister of Lady Madelaine, I am necessarily *hors de combat*. I would, however, venture to remind you of her near relationship to both your mother and yourself."

"Which you must permit me at once and most unequivocally to deny, as regards myself, Lady O'Halloran," I said haughtily. "My grandfather was twice married—in the first instance to the daughter of some obscure Scotch farmer, whose very name has escaped me—if, indeed, it was ever uttered beneath this roof; and the second time to a woman of rank equal to his own, and probably of more ancient descent—*my* grandmother. The Lady Flora is descended from the petty Highland Laird; and is consequently a connection of mine, not a relative."

Lady O'Halloran shook her head in evident sadness. "I have done, my dear Miss Tilden; and yet, for your own sake, I would fain see you

adopt a more conciliating spirit. Leaving this point, however, to your serious and dispassionate consideration, let me assure you that if my occasional presence at Rooksley can afford you either comfort or gratification, I shall gladly avail myself of the suggestion of your father, and risk the displeasure of Lady Madelaine, to reconcile you to your new mode of life."

"Surely, madam," I said hastily, "neither this Scotch connection nor this unknown younger sister will interfere with my home-habits and occupations? Am I now at an age in which the novelty of unaccustomed coercion can be tamely borne?"

"Will you forgive me, dear girl, if I am honest enough to tell you that in the false idea which you have just put forth, lies your most dangerous error?" asked my visitor in her turn; "after all, what is this age of which you speak, and in which you would find a safeguard against authority? Had you been less thoughtlessly—I was about to say, less viciously—educated, you would still have been a mere child, with your nursery and your school-room for a world; but your mind is like an exotic plant forced into premature blossom; you have begun to think and to judge at a period when other girls only act, and even then merely as automata of which others direct the springs."

My dignity was wounded ; and, although Lady O'Halloran paused, as if in expectation of some reply, I remained resolutely silent. To tell *me*—I who was beloved, and who loved in turn with all the ardour and romance of a first passion—that my proper and fitting sphere was the nursery, and my sole duty a blind and unreasoning obedience, was an excess of plain speaking to which I dared not trust myself to answer.

“ That I am a sharp and rude physician, I am well aware,” continued my companion, after a glance at my clouded countenance ; “ but this is a subject which I have often discussed with your excellent father, to whom I have faithfully promised that I will leave no measure unattempted to secure your happiness ; and I have boldly braved your anger at once, in order that you should be convinced I am really earnest in the work.”

I bowed coldly. I had not yet recovered my self-command.

“ When you have taken time to think, you will remember also, my dear child,” pursued Lady O'Halloran, perfectly unmoved by my displeasure, “ that if this premature plea of age is to avail yourself, your sister may also urge it in her own behalf, with almost equal pretensions, for she is merely one year younger than yourself ; and you would probably, twelve months ago, have advocated your

privileges upon this score as tenaciously as you do to-day. Moreover, believe me when I assure you that the society of a sister will be very dear to you. It is a pure and holy tie ; and, in your case, it will be doubly sweet ; for, reared as this poor girl has been, at a distance from all possibility of acquiring those accomplishments to which so large an amount of your own life has been devoted, you have it in your power to be to her a most generous and valuable friend, and to bind her still more closely to you by gratitude than blood."

I became instinctively interested.

" Will you not endeavour to accomplish this beautiful and sisterly undertaking?"

" I will, madam."

Lady O'Halloran bent over me, and, as if involuntarily, pressed her lips to my forehead. That calm and almost solemn kiss had a strange effect upon me. I had been accustomed to the most lavish caresses from my infancy, and I believe that I estimated them at their just value ; but there was something so heartfelt, so matronly, so *real*, in that of Lady O'Halloran, that I raised her fingers to my lips, and the large tears gushed from my eyes.

" Why was I never before treated like a reasonable being?" I exclaimed mournfully. " If I were old enough to play my part among the other puppets in my mother's drawing-room, was I not

also capable of being led by better impulses than those of vanity and selfishness? I have been unfairly dealt with; but I have at last a friend. I *will* love this unknown sister, dear Lady O'Halloran—that is, I will strive to love her; but my heart tells me that there is much to undo.”

“ She will come to you, meek, timid, and, it may be, strangely ignorant of all the showy lore of modern scholarship, perhaps;” pursued my companion; “ but then she will also come to you pure, and fresh, and charming; knowing no guile, unsuspicious of deceit, confiding, simple, and affectionate. Would you close your heart against so genial an inmate? Credit me when I assure you that it would be no easy task. But you have already decided that the attempt shall not be made; and I have sufficient reliance on your honour and good faith, my dear Miss Tilden—”

“ Call me Eveleen !” I cried passionately. “ All the world—even my own mother—seems to have forgotten that I bear another name besides that of my family; but you—dear, kind Lady O'Halloran—you, who are at once the friend of the father and the child, surely you will cease to address me so coldly, when I convince you that I am not altogether unworthy of your regard.”

“ Your father, at least, understood you, my poor victimized girl,” said my visitor, as she opened

her arms, and I flung myself, deeply moved, upon her bosom. "He told me that you would well repay my zeal; and you will repay it, will you not, Eveleen? And I shall see the little family-party at Rooksley at once affectionate and happy, even including the 'Scotch connection.'"

I could not join in the smile. Her description of the meek, confiding, deficient sister, to whom I was ere long to be all in all, had overwhelmed me with romantic delight; but the vision of Lady Flora Glenfillan—whose "stringent guardianship" had been the most bitter threat of my mother, passed like a dark shadow over my heart.

"I will pledge myself no further to-day, even to Lady O'Halloran," I said at length.

"Well, well, perhaps I am unreasonable to expect more;" replied the good lady gaily. "I hope to see you again before your new inmates arrive; you will then have recovered the first shock of your surprise. And now, will you do *me* a pleasure, my dear—Eveleen? If so, tie on your shawl and bonnet, jump into my pony-chair, and spend the remainder of this bright day with me. Your carriage can convey you home at night; and I promise, indeed I do, that unless you yourself provoke it, the subject which we have just been so earnestly discussing shall not be touched upon again. So come fearlessly, my dear girl, and admire the

hundred expedients by which I endeavour to conceal from myself the fact that I am no longer rich ; and learn, at the same time, the wholesome truth, that it is very possible to be happy without either establishment or equipage, when the heart is filled by a much dearer interest.

Need I say that I accepted an invitation so given as frankly as I received it. Far, however, from shrinking away from the subject of the forthcoming change in my destiny, I recurred to it more than once ; and when I at length parted from my kind hostess, it was with a feeling of increased respect for her ; and, what I had never in my life experienced until that moment, a growing distrust of my own perfectibility.

CHAPTER XV.

It was fortunate that Lady O'Halloran's attention to my father's request had been so prompt, for the travellers arrived on the succeeding evening. Never shall I forget my sensations when their arrival was announced to me! Before I left the Hall, my zealous hostess had wrung from my reluctant lips that I would do my best to love, not only my unknown sister, but also the guardian of her childhood: in making the latter promise, however, I felt that my heart had no part in the pledge. Civil I knew that I should necessarily be, for I believed that I was too well-bred to degrade myself by any exhibition of rudeness; and I resolved to struggle at courtesy; but for aught beyond this I was still quite unprepared.

I rose from my harp with a throbbing heart. Stir a step beyond the room to welcome the newcomers I could not. I felt sick and faint. I was angry with myself for my ill-timed emotion, but I

could not overcome it ; and while I was endeavouring to rebuke myself into at least the semblance of composure, they were ushered into the apartment.

In the van stalked a tall, gaunt figure, draped in a cloak of woollen plaid ; which chequered horror I was subsequently informed was the Glenfillan tartan. There was a head-dress also of some nameless material and indescribable form, which was flung off abruptly ; and before I could command myself sufficiently to give utterance to one word of greeting, or had even caught a glimpse of my sister, I found myself clasped in two long arms, and hugged so tightly to the Glenfillan tartan, that I had not breath even to scream ; while a shrill voice, in a strong Scotch accent, was pouring forth a flood of vehement ejaculations.

I will not attempt to expatiate on my disgust. This was stringent guardianship, indeed ! The travel-reeking cloak ; the hot breath that seemed to stagnate upon my forehead ; the fearful clutch from which I really believed my very bones to be endangered, settled the relative positions of Lady Flora and myself for ever. It was an unaccustomed and coarse contact to which I instinctively felt that I could never submit without the deepest repugnance. I was at once terrified and disgusted ; and when the grasp was at length relaxed, and that my tormentor (for such she seemed at the moment)

drew back, and held me at arms' length, in order to examine my person at her ease, and that I saw the prominent cheek-bones, the sharp nose and chin, and the disordered and uncurled masses of grizzled hair which had escaped from beneath what was evidently intended to represent a cap, I involuntarily closed my eyes to shut out the unpleasant object which had forced itself upon me so abruptly.

My aunt! No, no—even in that moment of intense annoyance, I found leisure to thank the fates that if this were indeed the Lady Flora Glenfillan, she was at least no aunt of mine.

“And my sister—” I at length gasped out; “where is my sister?”

“Ay, come, Addy, and show yourself!” exclaimed the gaunt apparition, in a tone which betrayed at least as much asperity as affection. “Come and show yourself, child. Ye have no reason, that I ken of, to be ashamed of facing even your town-bred sister!”

And “Addy” did come forth from her hiding-place behind her aunt; and my romantic susceptibilities were somewhat chilled by the fact that while I had been imprisoned in the arms of Lady Flora, instead, as I anticipated, of being overwhelmed with emotion, curiosity, and awe, she had quietly divested herself of her travelling wraps, and was just giving a last touch to the glossy bands of

auburn hair which were parted upon her forehead. I nevertheless opened my arms to receive her ; but, instead of availing herself of the movement, she folded her hands primly over her bosom, and dropped me a curtsey which would not have been out of keeping at the close of a dancing lesson.

“Hech ! child, is that what I bid you do !” harshly demanded the titled duenna. “Do you not know that Eve-leen is your own sister ? Why should you not make free with her ? Did you see me stand curtseying and making ceremonies ? Are you not under your own mother’s roof ? And have you not as much right to expect a loving welcome as she has to offer it ?”

The apparent automaton, upon this judicious, well-timed, and conciliating address, did as she was desired. The cheek was cold, however, which was pressed to mine, for our lips, as if through mutual disappointment, did not meet ; the pulsations of the heart which for a brief instant beat against my own were calm and regular. I was altogether taken by surprise.

When we had seated ourselves, awaiting the announcement of refreshments of which the travellers stood greatly in need—for Lady Flora had lived all her life beyond the Tweed, and made it a principle not to scatter her money upon the road—refreshments which, *par parenthèse*, she was provi-

dent enough to order as she passed through the hall, I had leisure to examine my two new companions. With the aunt my curiosity was soon fully satisfied. I felt that Lady O'Halloran herself would not have a word to say on that subject ; and when I turned my eyes upon the niece, I discovered that she was similarly occupied with myself. What effect had been produced by my appearance upon the mind of my sister I could not, however, even guess. There was not a trace of emotion of any sort upon her countenance. She was as calm, as cold, and as composed, as though nothing had occurred for which she was not perfectly prepared.

As our eyes met, those of Adela were quietly withdrawn ; and I pursued my survey in the intervals of a conversation in which I was little more than an auditor. It consisted of reminiscences of the road ; comments on the grievous outlay to which they had been subjected by their journey ; surmises of impositions, to which, nevertheless, Lady Flora could not attach any tangible proof ; and other equally high-bred and interesting topics. I had, however, no alternative, save to sit by as patiently as I could, and endeavour to form some idea of what my sister *might* be, when relieved from the strait-waistcoat of her guardian's presence.

With her personal appearance I was astonished. She was decidedly not a beauty ; nor did she give

any promise of ever becoming such ; but she had one of those *piquante* and peculiar faces which frequently prove more attractive than merely regular features. It was evidently a countenance capable of immense expression ; although at the present moment it was as passionless and immobile as a paste-board mask. She was unusually tall ; indeed, in this particular, she had the advantage of me, for despite my year of eldership I stood no whit higher than herself ; nor had she been under the roof of Rooksley many hours ere I discovered that if I had acquired elegance by study and long habit, my sister was no less gifted with a gracefulness to the full as desirable. Even disguised as she was in a costume in which I would not have permitted my waiting-woman to officiate at my toilette, this fact did not escape me ; and it induced a feeling of interest in the fair creature who displayed so much good material to work upon.

“ And now, lassies,” said Lady Flora, before we left the supper-room, where she had consumed a greater quantity of food than had ever been previously contemplated by the attendants ; “ now, we are all quite at home together, and shall, I dare say, get on weel eneugh. What Eve-leen does not know, you, Addy, can teach her ; for I dare say her education, as they call it, has been but a strange rumgumfery o’ useless and unprofitable

nonsense ; and if she should chance to know anything that you have not been taught, why, she can teach you. I shall say naething o' other things to-night. To-morrow will be a new day, and we shall soon understand each other."

I felt that we already understood each other ; and my contempt for the new authority which had been set over me was so great, that an expression of scorn rose involuntarily to my lip, which I instantly discovered, by the deep flush that passed transiently over her face, was not lost upon my sister.

" I have consented to leave my home ;" pursued Lady Flora, turning the lounging-chair upon which she had been seated at table towards the fire, throwing herself back in an attitude infinitely more easy than graceful, and crossing her feet upon the fender, with an expression of well-fed resignation ; " I have consented to leave my dear Glenfillan, for the first time in my life, in order to be useful to my sister and her children. It is na every one who is competent to take charge of two young ladies wi' noble blood in their veins, and co-heiresses into the bargain." (I winced slightly, as she spoke ; but, on looking into the placid face of my sister, the feeling vanished.) " I flatter myself, however, even although I have heard some sad rumours of your giddy doings, Eve-leen, that all will

end conformably ;” continued the lady very sententially, while I felt my brow burn on discovering that the large brown eyes of Adela were riveted upon me. “ You will have a gude example in your sister, and a still better one in me ; for I am proud to feel that never, from my girlhood even to the present day—or I should rather, perhaps, say night, for I’m afraid that its growing awfu’ late—has any one ventured even to hint a doubt of the virtue and propriety of Lady Flora Glenfillan.”

“ I can quite believe it, madam,” I said, with another saucy smile, as I looked her steadfastly in the face.

“ And not only it was never doubted,” she resumed, “ but I may also boast that there never was cause for it to be sae.”

“ The one position is as easily credited as the other ;” I again replied in the same tone. “ A woman’s reputation, like the water of the ocean, should not only be able to reject all impurities, but also to resist all taint ; a task in which it is probably sometimes assisted by its natural nauseousness.”

I was conscious that my sister started as the words fell upon her ear ; and their cool insolence was too palpable even for the obtuseness of Lady Flora. She turned her small, light, gray eyes upon me with a questioning expression, to which her lips

did not, however, provide an echo. The trope had bewildered her, and she could not clearly see her way.

“It is no sma’ thing,” whistled the shrill voice once more after a moment’s pause, “to root out a’ one’s old habits, and to leave all one’s old friends, to live in a strange place and among strangers; and, had the present Lord Glenfillan been a little more civil and wiselike towards his own kith and kin, I do not know that I should have had resolution to upset all my plans and arrangements, to come wandering the world now-a-days; but to be shut out o’ the Castle, where I had been born and bred, was more than I *could* bear; and, besides, it was time that Addy made acquaintance with her nearest blood relations, and had a chance of showing what was in her; and the difference between a good, honest, steady education in the heart of the highlands, and a flashy, tricky, ne’er-do-weel bringing-up by French flirts and fly-away dancing-masters; and so you see, Eve-leen, here we are; and I shall be glad if, by doing my duty to my sister, I should haply be the saving of you, while it’s yet time; for, being both my nieces—”

“Your ladyship will pardon me;” I hastily and resolutely interposed; for I was now urged beyond my forbearance by the stolid self-sufficiency of the speaker, and felt that the struggle for supremacy must come, and that, consequently, the sooner it

were commenced, the less difficult I should find it to assert my pretensions and to secure the victory ; “your ladyship must really pardon me, if I disabuse you without further delay of the error under which you appear to be labouring. Neither Miss Adela Tilden nor myself have the honour of being your nieces. Our connection with you, through the medium of our mother, is at once slight and undefined. We are the descendants of the Earl of Glenfillan through his marriage with the Honourable Miss O’Finistree ; and we claim no kindred with the race of Mac — something—I have really forgotten the precise name — from which you are yourself descended.”

I shall never forget the pause which ensued. Lady Flora lay back upon her cushions, with her small eyes dilated, and her large mouth wide open. The demure countenance of my sister was bent down over the hearth-rug ; and I sat erect, and panting with indignation and offended dignity, confronting my victim.

“ Heard ever human ears the like ? ” at length ejaculated Lady Flora in a tone of horror. “ Before Addy would dare to breathe such blasphemy against the family-name, she would consent to be laid in the family-vault. And you not fifteen ! Well was it that my father, the Earl, was carried there before these things came to pass ! ”

“ You appear to have taken your present step under a delusion, madam ;” I said coolly, so soon as she had delivered herself of this somewhat irrelevant apostrophe ; “ and I consider it better at once to undeceive you. The inducement held out by Lady Madelaine, which has decided you to undertake the charge of my conduct and principles, is, of course, best known to yourself. That I should find your delegated authority essentially disagreeable, and discordant to all the past habits of my life, my mother very considerably hinted to me ; and I as resolutely made up my mind to abate the annoyance to the uttermost of my power. I had consequently schooled myself to receive you with civility and respect—even to go further than this, if I found it possible, and to endeavour to look upon you as a family connection. You have, however, at once and for ever relieved me from the extreme difficulty of such an attempt ; for you have met me in the spirit of a task-mistress, and sought to humble me, not only in my own eyes, but even in those of a younger sister, utterly unknown to me until within the last few hours. This line of conduct, as unexpected as it is indelicate, quite exonerates me to my own heart, for the future ; and, as my mother has decided that you are to be an inmate of Rooksley for some time at least, we had better come to an understanding at once. You have

been pleased to depreciate, in by no means measured terms, the education which I have received. It is a system, nevertheless, that I have not the most remote intention to abandon, and in which it is more than probable that your ladyship will not feel the slightest interest. Your proposal that I should make it useful to my sister I accept cheerfully, for she is my sister — and I shall esteem it a happiness to be of service to her. This concession is, however, the only one which I feel inclined to make. In your eyes, I may probably be still too young to assume such a position, but I have been reared with different ideas; and an appeal to Lady Madelaine Tilden will convince you that I am quite capable of maintaining the resolution which, from your own overweening assumption of authority, and want of regard for my feelings, I have found it necessary to adopt at once.”

I was somewhat overcome by my own effort at eloquence, but its effect was infinitely greater upon my auditor. She was absolutely transfixed with astonishment, and quite unequal to the emergency. It was, indeed, scarcely surprising that under the circumstances my indignation should have been great, for the transition was too violent and too sudden, from the adulation and encouragement of the refined and the educated, to the coarse comments and vulgar dictation of the ungainly

woman before me. Feeling, nevertheless, that I had better not trust myself with further discussion, and satisfied that I should be wise to follow up the impression which I had visibly produced, I rose haughtily from my chair ; and, without giving my discomfited antagonist time to rally, I said in a tone of sarcastic courtesy ; “ As I presume that we are all equally at home on all points at Rooksley, and, as your ladyship must need repose after such multifarious exertions, I will have the honour of wishing you good night ! ” and laying my hand upon the bell, I rang for my maid.

Still Lady Flora was silent. She was half-frightened, and half-exasperated ; while the scene in which I had enacted the tragic muse did not appear to discompose my incomprehensible sister in the slightest degree. She still wore the same expression of listless fatigue and unsympathizing ennui with which she had met my welcoming embrace ; and, on the entrance of my attendant, when I had curtseyed silently and distantly to the elder lady, she placed her passive hand in mine, and echoed my “ good night ” as calmly as though she had never in her life retired to rest without our having exchanged a similar greeting.

When I reached my own apartment, and had hurried through the necessary duties in order to be once more alone, I dismissed Joséphine, and flung

myself upon my bed in a paroxysm of passionate mortification. Was this the clinging, confiding, loving sister, whose affection was to repay me for every trial, and for every disappointment? Was this the guardian who was to control my destiny? *This!*

I need not expatiate on the result of my deliberations. I was at first startled at the extreme want of breeding and the homely idioms of Lady Flora, when I remembered that she was the sister of my dignified and fastidious mother, even prepared as I had been by the inferences and comments of the nursery (where my father's valet, during his period of favour with Mrs. Harris, had often beguiled the time by his broad sketches of the Castle in the highlands and its several inmates), to imagine that she differed greatly in all points from her more gifted and favoured relative; I had only, however, to pass the salient points of her career in review, to feel that my astonishment was misplaced. The pupil of Miss Margery Macspleuchan, actually, if not nominally, deserted throughout her girlhood by her father—the despised step-child of a high-born mother-in-law—the tolerated companion of a half-sister, with whom she had neither taste nor sympathy in common—still dependent on the will and subjected to the contact of a vulgar aunt—the rejected kinswoman of the tenant of her dead father's

home—and the great lady of a low circle, into which she was flung by circumstances, could not fairly be expected to make a very brilliant figure in the new position into which she was now forced.

Then came the question—How had my sister escaped? only to be followed by the more startling one of—*Had* she, in truth, escaped? and I felt a pang when I was obliged to answer my own query by the avowal that I could not judge. I had scarcely heard her utter a dozen sentences. I knew only that she was attractive and graceful in her person; with a voice of unusual sweetness, so slightly impregnated with the Scottish accent as rather to increase than diminish its charm; and that she had about her a collectedness and self-possession which would necessarily protect her against the vulgarity of which she had so fearful an example before her eyes. Altogether, she was an enigma. Lady Flora had even urged her to assert herself; but her ladyship had no Pygmalion touch, and the marble *would* not breathe.

At length I fell asleep, and dreamt that my sister was dumb, and that I was inventing a system of shorthand by which I might be enabled to converse with her; when suddenly the sounds of heavenly music stole upon my ear, and I saw her seated beside my bed, endeavouring to awaken me by the most delicious ballad to which I had ever listened.

I saw her distinctly. There were the same soul-speaking, clear, brown eyes, the same attractive face, the same tall, slight, graceful form ; but now every feature spoke ; every lineament was redolent of radiant and loving expression ; her gentle look was turned upon me ; her fair arms were outspread to embrace me ; we were indeed sisters, in heart as well as name.

It was a beautiful apotheosis !

CHAPTER XVI.

I was wide awake on the following morning for hours before Joséphine made her appearance, but I could not resolve to rise ; for I felt that henceforth I should be able to command no solitude save that which was afforded by my own apartment ; and, for aught that I could tell, even that might, in its turn, be invaded by the extraordinary authority which it had pleased my mother to set over me. As I recalled the image of Lady Flora, I at times doubted if I were not bewildered by a wild dream, in which I had so blended fallacies with facts that I could not, at once, disentangle them. But no ! the more I dwelt upon the events of the past evening, and the more I cast off the lingering trammels of sleep, the more I became conscious of the hideous reality. I felt sick and feverish with disgust ; and I strove to put away the image of the elder lady, and to think only of my sister. Here, at least, there was interesting food for

speculation. I *could* not have seen her in her real character. Such coldness and reserve were incompatible with her sex and youth; and, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, almost impossible had she been a free agent. My dream, too! Had not my dream shown me what she really was, when delivered from the incubus of Lady Flora's presence? Yes—yes—I had found at once a sister and a friend. And then my vanity awoke. How I should astonish this mountain-maiden by the exhibition of my dazzling accomplishments; and how delighted she would be when I undertook to initiate her in the same brilliant mysteries! Her toilette, too, must be reformed; and she should make use of my wardrobe until her own was rendered available. I was full of projects; and still my harmonious and graceful dream gave a charm and a melody to all which related to this new-found sister. I even became anxious lest Lady O'Halloran should not do her justice, in her horror of the maiden aunt.

“I fear that the sleep of Mademoiselle was disturbed last night;” said Joséphine, as she drew back my curtains, and let in a glorious gush of sunshine.

“By no means; I never slept more soundly, nor dreamt more pleasantly.”

“Then Mademoiselle did not hear her sister?”

“Hear my sister! Why, what apartments did she occupy?”

“Those next to Mademoiselle. It was the order of *Miladi*; and *Madame la tante* has the rooms opposite. The gallery is now full.”

“Ah, indeed! And did my sister walk the said gallery all night, that you imagined she had broken my rest?”

“*Point du tout*,” said the Frenchwoman, somewhat surprised at the inquiry, and marvelling still more at any question from my lips; “but before she went to rest *la dame écossaise* was an hour with her in her dressing-room, where they were employed in reading; after which Mademoiselle Adèle sang a hymn; *et pardi, c’est une belle voix!*”

Sang a hymn! My own sister sang a hymn before she retired to her bed! I felt as though I had received a heavy blow. I could have better borne anything than this! I was so overwhelmed, that I remained for an instant with my eyes riveted upon Joséphine, and utterly unable to articulate a word. A mocking smile sat on the countenance of the *soubrette*. She evidently enjoyed my discomfiture, but I was indifferent to her triumph. I had but one feeling of mortification, of disappointment, of humiliation. My dream had not been all a dream—and my only sister was—a methodist! This was, indeed, an unlooked-for

misfortune — an almost irremediable evil. She might have stayed away from church for ever, and refused to set an example to the lower orders, as I occasionally thought it right to do ; she would have met with no interference from me, nor should I have commented upon her absence ; but to fall into the other extreme was so low, so unladylike ! I had no distinct perception of the meaning of the term “methodist,” but I knew that it *must* be low, that it *must* be unladylike, for I remembered to have once heard Dr. James tell my father that nearly all the tradespeople at the post-town were methodists ; and I knew, moreover, that my mother had refused to suffer a servant who professed methodism to be received into her household.

And now—here was my sister psalm-singing under her very roof ! These were the results of Lady Flora’s guardianship. Poor Adela’s prospects were ruined, if once her delinquency was noised abroad. I had no longer any hope of seeing her make a figure in the world. Without this misfortune, with time, and my instructions, she *might* have been rendered presentable ; but now all was over. Who could make anything of a methodist ? Of course, as she sang hymns, she sang nothing else ; while dancing and drawing must be deadly sins. No wonder that she always sat in silence ; she evidently considered it wrong to converse ; so

there was an end of all prospect of companionship. She *might*, under other circumstances, have consoled me for the advent of Lady Flora ; but now it was a case of Gog and Magog ; and I should be inevitably tutored, and prayed, and preached to death ! How sincerely I pitied myself I need not say ; nor in how haughty and self-centred a mood I descended to breakfast. *I* had, at all events, sung no vesper or matin hymn.

Lady Flora had taken a violent cold, and remained in bed. How happy this casualty would have made me, had it not been for Joséphine's unlucky news ; but now I met my sister with a face as composed as her own ; and while we uttered our earliest greeting, each extended her hand, and neither appeared to desire a warmer salutation. I ought to have remembered the holy calm, the delicious happiness which was shed over my dream, but I did not. I felt only that my sister was a methodist !

There is a strange and startling power in that mystic word, especially to those who, like myself, were altogether ignorant of its meaning. I looked upon it as a kill-joy, as a marplot ; and, worse than all, as something quite beyond the pale of fashionable society. “ We are all born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward ;” but this was a trouble—a misfortune beyond all polite calculation ! Even my

mother, in her first outbreak of displeasure against me, could never have imagined or conceived that she was about to make me the daily and hourly companion of a methodist.

When our almost silent breakfast was at length brought to an end, I proposed to my sister that we should pass into the saloon, as I was anxious to prepare for my music-master, whom I expected that morning. She complied in the same tame, listless manner which had, since her arrival, distinguished her bearing. My principal motive in this arrangement was, however, as my reader will at once have guessed, to astonish her by my musical proficiency. After a slight apology for leaving her to amuse herself for an hour, I seated myself at the harp, and began to prelude, with a rapid finger and a steady touch, which I felt convinced must electrify my solitary auditor, but my skill produced no such effect ; or, if Miss Adela Tilden were indeed astonished, her surprise was sufficiently great to prevent all outward exhibition ; for when I at length permitted myself to glance towards her, she was quietly lying back on a sofa, and deeply engaged upon a small volume which she had taken from her reticule—a Book of Prayers, of course !

I withdrew my indignant eyes, and grew strong in the very recklessness of my mortification. My harp-master had lately brought to me a piece of

music filled with elaborate and difficult passages ; and although I as yet had studied it but imperfectly, still I felt satisfied that I had mastered its intricacies sufficiently to make an advantageous display before a novice like my sister. I accordingly commenced my undertaking with some little assumption of consequence—placed myself in a more studied attitude, and was difficult in the arrangement of my music-stand. At last, slapdash into my task I plunged, each moment in danger of being brought to a decided stand-still, and yet, thanks to my presence of mind, constantly extricating myself by some bold interpolation or omission, until I ultimately thundered through the last page.

Faulty as my performance had been, I nevertheless felt desirous of applause, and I accordingly turned towards my sister, and, in as modest a manner as I could accomplish, inquired her opinion, not of my own science, but of the rondo itself."

" I have no doubt that it is very fine ;" was the unmoved reply ; " but I confess that I have found it impossible to follow all its movements. To me, possibly from my ignorance of the subtleties of harmony, there has seemed occasionally to be a great incoherency ; but, as I before remarked, the deficiency was most probably in myself."

And she calmly resumed her reading.

I felt the blood rush over my face ! I looked earnestly towards her, but I might with as much profit have consulted the ceiling for her latent meaning, if she really had one, as the immobile features that met my view. Still I was by no means satisfied, for I was conscious that the incoherences alluded to had been quite perceptible to myself, and I began to apprehend that they might have been even more so to a listener. I was deeply mortified. My first effort at display had been a decided failure. I had neither courage nor temper to make another attempt ; so, thrusting my harp from me, I approached the sofa on which my sister was seated, and inquired if she were musical ?

“ Not what *you* will consider musical, I am afraid ;” she said with a faint smile. “ I am no harpist, and know only enough of the more humble piano to set me above the necessity of troubling others to accompany my voice. Mine has been rather the teaching of nature than of art ; but still, such as it is, it will at least enable me to return your own amiable endeavour to amuse ;” and laying down her book, without one moment’s hesitation, without one symptom of shyness or reluctance, she seated herself at the instrument.

Her account of herself had been a thoroughly correct one. She was by no means either a brilliant

or a scientific musician ; but she had not completed one stanza of the ballad which she had selected, before I perfectly understood that she had a faultless ear, and an unusually melodious voice. I thought of my patchwork rondo, and could have wept with annoyance at having so needlessly exposed myself.

When she ceased singing, my sister rose as calmly as she had sat down, and again moved towards her sofa, but I resolved not to yield tamely to what I considered as a defeat ; and therefore, ringing for a servant, I desired that my drawing portfolios might be brought into the room. They soon appeared, and I did the honours of what my master had declared to be my performances, but which had derived no little advantage from his own skilful “ finishing up,” as demurely as I could. They were of a heterogeneous, or, as I should at that period have said, of an universal description. There was no style which I had left untouched ; figures, flowers, landscapes, interiors, busts, and portraits.

Fortunately, idle young ladies and gentlemen had not then learned the art of degrading art, save by their imperfect efforts to pourtray it, so that my books contained neither poonah-paintings, nor transfer-pieces, nor japan-work, nor any other of those cheap, and despicable, and worthless monstrosities which in the present day are one of the

triumphs of ignorant indolence over artist-aspiration.

My sister turned leaf after leaf with equal patience and placidity: she made no comment — she offered no criticism. She seemed to feel that by looking at each in turn, and persevering to the end, she had done all that could be expected of her; or, more encouraging thought! that here at least she must not venture an opinion.

“ You paint, of course,” I said carelessly.

“ Not at all.”

“ Nor draw?”

“ Not, probably, as you understand the term. I can do none of these brilliant and showy things. I merely sketch from nature. I am an adopted child of the mountains, as you know, and needed little assistance to learn how best to make them all my own.”

My sister was growing every moment more inexplicable — I had almost said, more provoking. She was certainly an extraordinary girl; as womanly for her years even as myself, but from totally different causes. We had not lived a week under the same roof, ere I discovered that, whatever advantage I might have over her in society by the greater variety and brilliancy of my acquirements, I must be particularly careful to avoid all rivalry in the higher and more solid branches of

education. While I had been striving to attain to the fashionable jargon of my mother's set, she had been buried in books. While I had been talking, she had been thinking; and while I had been cheated out of my childhood by constant contact with a crowd, she had been beguiled of hers by the companionship of two staid elderly women, and the solitude of a mountain home.

Lady O'Halloran, who drove to Rooksley a day or two after the arrival of its new inmates, was enchanted with her.

The cold which Lady Flora had taken on the road proved more severe than she had anticipated, and she was still confined to her room, greatly to my relief. I, therefore, induced my kind neighbour to remain during the day, which, believing that she might benefit us by her presence, she readily consented to do. It required no great penetration on her part to discover the restraint which existed between my sister and myself; and with the most amiable zeal she at once endeavoured to remove it; but the work of years can seldom be overthrown in a day. It requires extraordinary impulse and emotion to open hearts which have long been closed against each other; and we were alike, upon this subject, too indifferent for either. Had it been otherwise, Lady O'Halloran might in some degree have succeeded;

for, by a happy coincidence, the post brought me that day a letter from my father, announcing his intention of running down to Rooksley to spend a week or ten days with his long-separated children, directly that parliament should be prorogued. My delight knew no bounds. A letter from my father—his *first* letter! Unlike the epistles of my mother, it contained no lurking sarcasm—no cold, dictatorial commands; no supercilious warnings;—it breathed only affection, hope, and confidence. I turned, full of joy, towards my sister.

“Do you know our father, Adela?”

“I have seen him twice.”

“In the highlands.”

“Yes.”

I was silent for a moment. During the two years that I was left to the charge of menials at Rooksley he had never sought me. A feeling of jealousy crept coldly over my heart; but I was too happy in the prospect of his promised visit to dwell upon this new mortification, and I once more turned to the letter. Lady O'Halloran, with instinctive watchfulness, had observed the change which came over me, and she hastened to exclaim:—

“But twice, my dear child, during your whole life! You have indeed been subjected to a deprivation beyond your comprehension. Now, however, we will trust that greater happiness is in store for you,

for you cannot yet understand all the value of such a father."

"And yet, madam," said my sister with more feeling than she had before betrayed, "you will believe that he is, nevertheless, very dear to me when I tell you that to him I am, as yet, indebted for the few hours of hopeful happiness that I have ever known. It was from his lips I learned that I was not altogether an alien from the hearts and hearths of my parents, and that all the affection which they had to give had not been utterly poured out upon their first-born.

"And you have full proof that such was the fact;" said our visitor with good-humoured eagerness. "You came into the world weak and sickly, my dear Miss Adela; the atmosphere of London was poison to your tender lungs; physicians recommended quiet and a bracing air until you should have grown to girlhood. Their injunctions were carefully observed; the period of trial is happily overpast; and now, here you are, under the same roof with your only sister, where I hope soon to see but one heart and one interest between you."

A bitter smile played about the expressive lips of Adela. Like myself, she felt at that moment the utter impossibility that such should ever be the case. Place the past in as kind and favourable a

light as she might, Lady O'Halloran could not remove the conviction from my sister's mind that she had been the victim of an undue partiality for myself. While hundreds had already been lavished upon my education ; while I was even now a woman of fashion in dress, in manner, and in self-possession, she had been comparatively left to her own moral resources for all progress. I say comparatively ; for her next remark, still addressed to our guest, explained much in her acquirements and manners which had hitherto appeared to me inexplicable.

“ The extreme care and anxiety which Lady Madelaine Tilden displayed to preserve my constitution from possible hazard, my dear madam, is an obligation which I am never likely to forget. Had she extended her solicitude to my education, it would undoubtedly have been still heavier ; and the fact that my father did so, must be my apology, if all the filial affection which I have been able to call into action under the very peculiar circumstances of my position, are consequently centred upon him. To his care I owe the friendship and guidance of Mrs. Davenport, a lady whose widowhood reduced her income so considerably as to determine her, at the entreaty of my father, to take up her residence in a highland village, in order to superintend my education. She had for-

merly moved in the first circles of fashion, and she felt the contempt for such society which must pervade every well-regulated mind. She taught me to estimate at its just value the emptiness, hollowness, and falsehood of what is presumptuously enough called The World ! To hold time as too precious to be frittered away upon frivolous acquirements bereft of all intrinsic value ; and to be sufficiently the mistress of myself to withhold my friendship and my confidence from the mere butterflies of vanity."

"And I should have decided that she acted wisely, my dear young lady ;" said Lady O'Halloran ; with admirable calmness, as she marked the red and angry spot that was burning on my cheek at the covert sarcasm of the extraordinary girl beside her. "I should have decided that she had acted wisely, had she waited ten years longer before she inculcated a lesson of suspicion and self-righteousness upon a mere child, totally unable to substitute for the brilliant trifles which she denounced, better and more solid qualities of mind and heart ; or, had she shown sufficient good taste to ascertain what might be the wishes of your immediate relatives upon so serious a subject. At your age, you should have no misgivings, no doubts of others ; it is only time and experience which can give the right to judge those about us ; and who

can tell the secret springs of soul which are touched to produce certain results, even then? Believe me—and I say it with regret—that upon so faulty a foundation as distrust and contempt of your fellow-creatures, a hideous superstructure of selfishness, arrogance, and prejudice may be easily built up. You must not be angry or offended at my frankness. I am your father's friend. I am anxious to see his children happy in each other. You have both much to undo, my dear girls. You have been estranged, as well in heart as in person, by peculiar circumstances. You are both suffering in feeling and in disposition from an extreme system of education. You have both been forced beyond your years; Eveleen, my dear Miss Adela, who will, I believe, enter upon her fifteenth birthday next week, has been for years one of the 'butterflies of vanity' whom you have just denounced: you, who are barely fourteen, are putting forth dogmas more seemly for thirty or thirty-five—for the lips of matured womanhood—than for those of an inexperienced girl, who knows nothing of the world beyond the mountains which overhang the secluded home of her infancy, and the sentiments of, in all probability, an amiable but disappointed woman. Eveleen has been prematurely fashionable—you have been precociously wise—each, understand me, in your own conceit; and you are alike self-deceived. You

have still much to learn. Now, take my frank advice, and you will both live to feel that it is worth attention. Endeavour each to profit by the good qualities, whether natural or acquired, of your companion, and the advantage will be mutual. It is this fancied superiority on both sides which will prevent all perfect understanding and all kind feeling between you. Divest yourselves alike of personal and mental assumption ; be what Heaven willed that you should be, gentle, mild, and loving ; and, trust me, you have long years of happiness and affection before you."

As the child of her friend, and as the victim of a mother's caprice, Lady O'Halloran was evidently prepared, even before they met, to encourage a partiality for my sister. Delighted by her intelligence, by the docility with which she listened to her admonitions and advice, and with the extraordinary development of her intellect, so broadly contrasted with my overweening vanity and violent deportment, she watched her narrowly, almost fondly ; and, I verily believe, succeeded in persuading herself before she left us that evening, that she thoroughly comprehended her character.

The result proved her mistake. Circumstances alone could develop so peculiar a nature. Never, without being false, was there such a reserved dis-

position. Adela spoke little — her explanatory speech to Lady O'Halloran, which I lately quoted, was, as far as I can remember, the longest I ever heard her utter — and when she did converse, it was deliberately and guardedly. Occasionally vehement, but never gay; gloomy rather than serious in her general mood; passionately fond of pleasure, while affecting to despise its frivolity; her wishes and her will were like a spring, of which the power increases in proportion to the violence of the means used to counteract it. Sufficiently pretty to feel it unnecessary to shrink from competition, endowed with a fair portion of her mother's haughtiness, and gifted with a happy appreciation of her own advantages, Lady O'Halloran at once decided that she already betrayed the elements of a superior nature. She was astonished to find a girl of fourteen possessed of so much presence of mind, strength of character, and that faculty, so rare among young people, of rapid decision, whenever she was called upon either to act or to offer any opinion. We were, in truth, most singularly contrasted. Gay, lively, and even giddy, where my spirits were excited, I was frank and open by nature, and what dissimulation I possessed was the extraneous produce of education; and was, at all times, ill-sustained, and easy of detection. Yielding, and weak of purpose, when opposed; readily led away

by my own tastes, by example, and by novelty, I required alike guidance and restraint ; and I should not, in all probability, have found a companion better suited to me than my sister, if we could, as Lady O'Halloran suggested, have divested ourselves of the false estimate which we had each made of our peculiar personal superiority, and placed confidence in one another. But from this

“ Consummation devoutly to be wished,”

we were a thousand leagues off. Our zealous friend pleased herself, nevertheless, by believing that, despite all which had gone before, we were still so young that the mere force of habit, when we had resided for a few months under the same roof, would produce affection, with all its blessed attributes of trust, and confidence, and peace. She forgot that all those by whom we were surrounded were not working in the same spirit as herself.

Adela, whose sickly infancy and weakly childhood had deprived her of the opportunities of physical exertion and healthful recreation which she could otherwise have commanded in her mountain solitude, was early thrown upon her own mental resources for occupation and amusement. The contracted ideas of Lady Flora, and the bitter retaliation of Mrs. Davenport upon a world from which her necessities had put her forth, were the only

moral engines employed to direct and develop the extraordinary powers and feelings of the student-girl. No wonder that her mind and tastes were prematurely aged. I have before confessed that, in the sterner and more severe branches of education, she was greatly my superior. I felt and knew this; and the conviction should have brought with it a sense of humiliation. It had, however, a totally different effect. Not one of my sister's acquirements—save, indeed, that which taught her to give its full value to a voice of wonderful compass and harmony—was calculated to produce the slightest effect upon the circle in which she was destined to move. She had been educated for the closet, not the court.

I, on the contrary, was early suffered to let the higher and more precious powers of my intellect run entirely to waste. As regarded that species of knowledge which the old moralist declared to be “better than houses or land,” I was profoundly ignorant. I had laid up no store for the winter of life. But then its sweet spring, and its blooming summer! There, indeed, I was unapproachable. I was already of the world, worldly. What though I might be deficient alike in self-knowledge and in knowledge of my fellow-mortals, I was not the less a proficient in the *argot* of the drawing-room, and the affectations of fashionable society. I was

pre-eminently handsome, perfectly self-possessed ; I could take my position, like a finished woman of the world ; and as for all that lay deeper, all that was buried beneath the surface, and which must be dug for before it could be reached — *cui bono* ? Once satisfied of my superiority, I resolved to give less way to the feelings which had surprised me on our first meeting. My affection had been flung back upon me ; I had not been understood. Here again I was conscious that I took high ground, and I determined to maintain it. I had too long been accustomed to admiration and applause to quail before a course of dry reading and antiquated knowledge. The result may be imagined. Poor Lady O'Halloran had taken too much for granted when she asserted that time and propinquity would necessarily produce affection. They did quite the contrary. Neither Adela nor I would bend. We were like two young forest trees which had each followed a transverse direction ; and the admonitions of the kind-hearted matron produced only the same effect upon us as an occasional gust of wind may be supposed to have produced upon the said saplings ; they ruffled for a moment the fresh leaves of our self-love, even bowed us towards each other for an instant, as though attracted by a new instinct ; and then rebounded the more sturdily to compel us to reassume our original position.

Before Lady O'Halloran left Rooksley, she reminded me of the promise which I had made to spend another day at the Hall before the close of the month, and I joyfully renewed the pledge. I felt that I had much to tell her in private, much to discuss, and, perhaps, something to justify. How was my gratification blighted, however, when I heard her extend the invitation to my sister—to Adela, of whom she knew absolutely nothing! I felt wronged, grievously wronged. That could no longer be esteemed a privilege which was so freely offered to a stranger. My heart leapt with indignation. I had passed months at Rooksley, abandoned, if not to the sole fellowship of servants—for from that degradation my own sense of propriety and natural pride of character had preserved me—at least to their unbroken contact; and no Lady O'Halloran had terminated my enforced solitude until urged to do so by my father; while, even before I had been allowed time and opportunity to feel that I had won the regard of my self-constituted friend, the same measure of civility was unhesitatingly meted out to my stranger sister!

It was a bitter moment. I felt as though I were deeply injured; and the more readily that Adela rather acquiesced in the arrangement than responded to the courtesy. To her the proposition and its result were evidently matters of equal indifference. She even made a stipulation that she would accom-

pany me only in the event of an improvement in Lady Flora's health. The reservation was met by a smiling rejoinder, and thus the affair was definitively arranged.

Lady O'Halloran's pony-carriage was announced; and I entreated her to put on her bonnet and mantle in my dressing-room. She consented; and at length we were alone. I considered myself too seriously aggrieved to lose a moment in telling her precisely what I felt.

"Thank you, my dear Eveleen;" she said affectionately, as she seated herself upon the sofa, and drew me to her side; "for this natural and unaffected proof of your confidence and regard. My most earnest wish is that I may win your love; yet remember that I do not ask it *all*; I shall be content with just so much as you may be able to grant to me, without wronging those who have a *right* to claim affection from you. And now let us quietly discuss the subject of your complaint. Am I to understand that you have an objection to visiting in company with your sister?"

"No, my dear Lady O'Halloran: in that point of view it is a matter of perfect indifference whether I am or am not accompanied by Adela; but, as regards yourself, I *had* hoped that you would have made some distinction between us, and that I should have been your most frequent guest."

"And wherefore?"

“ Because I have learnt to love you, and I flattered myself that you would not overlook the fact.”

“ And it is in order to win also the affection of your sister that I wish to see as much as possible of her. She is an extraordinary girl, Eveleen—a very extraordinary girl; and I foresee that she will never steer a middle course through life—she will either be the victim of society or its tyrant. Hers is no common character, but she is, as yet, far too young for self-guidance. Would you envy her the possession of a sincere and disinterested friend?”

I turned away my head, and made no reply.

“ Consider,” continued my monitress; “ how necessary such a resource cannot fail to be at her early age. The responsibility of depriving her of so essential a support would be a terrible one! Long estranged from her family, suddenly separated from the lady who had hitherto acted towards her the part of a mother as well as that of an instructress—plunged into new scenes, surrounded by new faces—can you not imagine somewhat of the desolation of her young heart? Can you not believe that it yearns for companionship and kindness?”

“ I am also an alien from my mother’s hearth,” I said moodily.

“Nay, nay—I admit no parallel in the two positions ;” persisted Lady O’Halloran. “Again, I entreat of you to recall the past to memory. While Adela was an exile whose very name was never uttered in her natural home, you were the petted child of luxury and indulgence ; and yet she had the same claim upon her parents as yourself. You were a beauty, and as such you were cherished ; your sister was declared to be plain and unattractive, and she was, according to the same parity of reasoning, put forth, and when such was possible, forgotten. But do you not see and feel how completely nature has revenged her ? Do you not perceive under that calm and undemonstrative deportment, a gracefulness and self-possession as remarkable as they are charming ? Neglected, as I am compelled to admit, even to you, that she has been, you ought to——”

“I am bound by no obligation which can regard Miss Adela Tilden, madam ;” I said warmly ; “it is from no fault of mine that she has suffered the evils which you have enumerated.”

“Nor do I blame you for the errors of those over whom you can exercise no control ;” was the quiet rejoinder. “Had it been otherwise, and that you had even lent yourself to such injustice from motives of jealousy and selfishness, I should have despised you too heartily to evince the least in-

terest or exertion in your fate. But surely this very negative and meritless fact of your noninterference does not exonerate you from the duty of endeavouring to make the present existence of your sister a bright and happy contrast from the past? Surely it does not place you beyond the pale of blotting out by your affection the mortifications which have hitherto been heaped upon her?"

"*My affection!*" I exclaimed with strong emphasis; "believe me when I assure you, my dear Lady O'Halloran, that such a privilege is not reserved for me. I have already probed my sister's spirit to its depths; the only feeling which I have aroused in her heart is avoidance—aversion were, perhaps, the fitter word: she has been taught to dislike me, and she has been an apt pupil."

"Eveleen, beware!" said Lady O'Halloran coldly, as she rose from her seat, and folded her mantle about her; "reflect ere it be too late. Wide as is the world, the children of the same parents must inevitably sometimes meet in its paths. Strive then that neither of you may have cause to shrink from those meetings. Consider the old age of your father, when his daughters must be his prop and stay. Kneel and pray that you may be delivered from the prejudices by which you are enslaved. Let me see you soon at the Hall, happy in each other's affection. And now—good night!"

CHAPTER XVII.

Lest my reader should tire of Rooksley, and, above all, of myself, I will at once transport him, or her, to Grosvenor Square, and relate what had occurred in Lady Madelaine's immediate circle before the arrival of my sister in England. The Putney villa was declared perfect. My mother, who had carried out all her projects most triumphantly, was in high beauty and spirits, and at the very acme of her popularity. Very few persons had ever seen the tall daughter of whom she had found it expedient to rid herself for a year or two, and still fewer cared to remember her. Lady Madelaine, at very infrequent intervals, made some vague allusion to "the children"—always a safe and indefinite species of phraseology as to age, like the *garçon* of France, and the postboy of our own country—but she risked nothing beyond a bare mention of their existence, considering it both impertinent and unnecessary to do more.

Miss Alexander had eloped with a French marquis, very poor and very proud ; and (as French marquises were, during my girlhood, most interestingly scarce) she returned to town after her marriage, quite satisfied to have bartered her five hundred a year for the title of *madame la marquise*. Poor Caroline was still constant to her truant admirer ; who, when he was not worshipping the bright eyes of my mother, was dreaming beside Lady Devereux, who, in her turn, was daily losing in beauty what she gained in *exigence*. Emily Vernon had dismissed Mr. De Clifford ; she was still living, or rather existing, in a fool's paradise ; she was still struggling to believe that Otterford loved her, for he lost no opportunity of telling her so whenever they chanced to meet in private ; and although his actions continued to belie his words, how could she doubt him, when she was only too conscious that her happiness and her life alike depended upon his truth ? Alas ! for the woman who gives away her heart, where she receives only asseveration in return ! Alas ! for the faith that builds up its strength upon the honour of a *roue*, which, like the pine-tree, produces neither blossom nor fruit.

And what of Otterford himself ? I may have seemed to deal harshly towards him ; for, hitherto, my readers will have discovered no symptom of

profligacy in him ; and those of his own sex will have readily forgiven the little duplicity of which I have shown him to be guilty. Women, according to the creed of the said sex masculine, are infinitely too credulous ; they should be more cautious before they yield to feelings too powerful to be combated by creatures so weak of mind and so fragile of frame. It is a happy argument, and a safe one, for they are not likely themselves to test its truth. Ay, truly : women who were created to be chosen, not to choose, should be born suspicious, calculating, and selfish : the will which is after marriage to be as pliant as the stem of the osier, should be previously firm and immutable, until reason and interest have convinced it of the safety and expediency of abandoning its perpendicular, and yielding to the force of circumstances.

There may be some slight inconsistency in such an argument ; perhaps, also, a little want of generosity ; but it has long been decided that such *ought* to be the case ; and there is little probability that an opinion so acceptable to the more lordly portion of the community will ever be rescinded.

Unfortunately for her, poor Emily was strangely deficient in this species of world-wisdom. Lord Otterford had told her that he loved her ; he had even sworn it upon his knees : he was young, earnest, handsome, and attractive. She saw him

welcomed in every circle, even where he appeared the least anxious to please. He had assured her that, however trammelled by the exacting vanity of Lady Madelaine, he loved her only. Simple-hearted, affectionate, and grateful, she had believed him—she had no alternative. Blame her not, however, ye who have shared a brighter fortune ; for she was expiating, fearfully expiating her error, by her failing health and her breaking heart.

Revenons à notre loup. Otterford was becoming weary of the constraint in which he had so long lived. He was consistent even in his vices. He had not been the slave of Lady Madelaine's caprice, simply *pour l'amour de ses beaux yeux* ; he had no such weakness ; the triumph was inadequate, and Otterford was an Utilitarian in his way. Time and opportunity were the capital upon which he trafficked, and he had already made great sacrifices to obtain a very inconsequent return. And yet—nothing could seem more promising. He was *l'ami de la maison* : the favoured cavalier of its lovely mistress ; and she was, in her turn, if not a forsaken, at least a *délaissée* wife : whether by her own agency or the will of her husband signified little. The fact itself sufficed. Otterford argued calmly, and the rather that he was perfectly aware of the ten thousand a-year which my father had settled upon his high-born bride. It is pleasant

for a man of fashion to win a fine woman who can never become *à charge* ; indeed, it is doubtful that, had he been ignorant of this small chapter of Lady Madelaine's private history, he would have so long pursued his project. Be that as it may, however, he had begun to think that the probation had endured long enough ; and that, as Mr. Tilden appeared to be thoroughly blind, and Lady Madelaine perfectly self-centered and fearless, it was quite time that the catastrophe of the drama should be played out.

That my mother had never contemplated such a finale to her innocent and amusing flirtation, and was satisfied that her smiles must overpay all the adoration which she so blandly and quietly accepted, I am quite convinced ; for the egotism of her vanity would scarcely permit her to form any other conclusion ; and she was consequently not at all likely to suspect the abstruse calculations of her most devoted slave. She might as well have been expected to nurse a presentiment of his declared passion for Emily ; Lady Madelaine, all woman of fashion as she was, could not be considered (regarding the expression in its just sense) as a woman of the world. True, she was acquainted with its elegancies, its conventionalities, its caprices, its shallow faith, and even its hollowness ; but of its actual vices she was nearly ignorant. Of its sys-

tematic sentiment, commencing in mawkish affectation, adopted as a resource against *ennui*, leading to folly and imprudence, and terminating in dishonour, she had, of course, heard more than once; but always as of something extraneous, and antipodean, with which she could, individually, have no possible interest or connection. Such matters were to her the mere *on-dits* of the day; the food which nourished the bitter *persiflage* of polished society; and happy indeed are those whose rare and enviable fate it is to live and die without further enlightenment upon so ungrateful and ungraceful a subject. Such, however, was not to be my mother's destiny.

It was a mild, bland morning—one of those delicious intervals, which, extraordinary as it appears to those who ever speculate upon the several degrees of comparison which exist between causes and effects, sometimes induce even the pleasure-worn and selfish votaries of fashion to believe that there may exist something for which it is not altogether impossible that it might be really worth while to live even beyond the confines of the metropolis—a lingering, sickly, ill-nurtured remnant of original purity and nature, which the hot and fetid breath of dissipation and idleness cannot always contrive to destroy, try it as it may. Every one who has run the gauntlet through half a dozen seasons in

London is well aware of the description of morning to which I allude ; just before the close of Spring ; I mean *really* Spring, when the race of social extravagance and folly is at its height ; when the mignonette in the balconies, forced into premature bloom in order to “meet the demand” six weeks before it was intended to blossom under the more genial sunshine of unassisted nature, is beginning to turn golden under its coat of dust and soot ; when the grass of the parks is bald in patches, and grimy as a whole ; when milliners grow consequential, and fine lady-customers conciliating, affable, and persuasive. Such was the precise moment at which occurred the morning in question ; and, as my mother was undergoing the subtle penance of Mademoiselle Félicie’s taste in the selection of half a dozen new head-dresses for the campaign of the ensuing week, she chanced, on one occasion, most accidentally to glance towards the garden of the square instead of into her toilette-glass ; and although the turf wore a sickly tint as though the soil beneath could afford but grudging nurture, and the trees bore a great resemblance to the “stock in trade” of an umbrella and cane merchant, which had been suddenly induced to sprout by some occult influence, they nevertheless reminded her of the beauty of the season ; and forthwith she remembered Putney, and the shrub-belted

lawn which stretched down to the Thames. The moment was propitious : she was free until the hour of dinner—she had neither made a new friend whom it was necessary to see at least once during the twenty-four hours, nor had she discovered an old intimate whom it was necessary to hate ; and she had, consequently, nothing of importance on her hands ; while, fortunately, all the half-dozen *coiffures* were so unbecoming, that every thing like indecision was out of the question, and therefore they created no delay.

“Take away all those horrors, Félicie, and order the open carriage for Putney ;” she said suddenly : “giving strict charge that it come round instantly.”

The *soubrette* disappeared.

“I slept wretchedly last night ;” yawned Lady Madelaine when her waiting-woman re-entered ; “I shall go alone ; the fresh air from the river will refresh me.”

“But milady will be *ennuiée en route*,” suggested Félicie in some surprise.

“No—I shall endeavour to sleep. Desire that the paper which contains Mr. Tilden’s last speech may be put into the landau. Jervis will know which I mean. It is on impressment, or colonization, or the bread bill, or something of that sort. She will find it in one of the morning rooms.”

The waiting-woman rang for her deputy ; and

having, in all probability, a project of her own which the absence of her lady would by no means tend to mar, very speedily arranged the new costume which had so suddenly become necessary; and my mother then descended to the library to await the appearance of her equipage.

There was something very delicate and touching in Lady Madelaine's idea of making the eloquent speech of her husband the companion of her suburban excursion. It was wifely and womanly. But, alas! we have it upon record that the Princess Talleyrand, being desirous on one occasion to do homage to the talent of Denon, by affecting an acquaintance with his writings, and, unhappily confusing his name with that of Defoe, whose *Robinson Crusoe* was one of the few books that she had ever really read, inquired, during a pause in the dinner at which he was an honoured guest whom the Prince was anxious to conciliate, "What had become of his man Friday?" and I am greatly afraid that had any one been indiscreet enough to ask Lady Madelaine, in her opera-box that evening, the actual subject of the aforesaid burst of eloquence with which my father had electrified the Commons, and which shared her drive to Putney, they must have contented themselves with an equally lucid description as that with which Félicie had previously been favoured.

The little impromptu excursion was delightful. The atmosphere, when once the close streets were left behind, was redolent of sweetness. The breeze came lovingly to the cheek and brow of my mother ; and she sank luxuriously upon her padded silk damask, and slept quietly ; while Psyche, her favourite and petted spaniel, amused its *ennui* by tearing to pieces the printed record of my father's parliamentary prowess. Suddenly, however, both were startled by the rapid galloping of a horseman who appeared to be endeavouring to overtake the carriage ; and the noise of whose approach rendered the high-bred bays who drew it somewhat unmanageable. Their uneasy movements dispelled Lady Madelaine's slumber ; and, as she looked up suddenly, the first object upon which her eyes rested was the scrupulously well-gloved hand of Lord Otterford, resting upon the side of the landau. For the only time, perhaps, since they had been acquainted, my mother blushed instead of smiling her welcome ; for, unaccountable as it may seem, she had really wished to be alone for two or three hours ; and, as it was a wholesome inclination which might have produced a good result, the more beneficial from its novelty, it was provoking enough that she was fated to disappointment.

“ You are doubtlessly bound Putneyward, my dear Lady Madelaine, since I find you here ? ” he

commenced, as he lifted his hat. "Nothing was surely ever so pleasantly devised. I caught a glimpse of your equipage as I turned an angle of the road ; and here I am, ready to protect you in your rural reveries ; and to prevent your running the chance of losing yourself so far from St. James's, and becoming a novel specimen of a *demoiselle errante*, without her knight."

"I am not quite sure that I shall admit of your attendance ;" was the languid reply ; "the day is so lovely, and I am so *descœuvrée* and exhausted that I really want rest—added to which I wished to say something civil to Mr. Tilden concerning his Wednesday night's speech, which every one who meets me is perpetually complimenting me upon, and of which I have not read a word ; and I intended to skim it over in one of the lawn chairs ; though that part of my plan is, I see, rendered abortive, Psyche having disposed of the paper in a manner more consonant to her own ideas of its value."

"And do you actually intend to be so cruel as to refuse me the pleasant office of *remplaçant* to a torn gazette?"

"I have, at all events, no seat to offer you here. Psyche must not have her airing spoilt by your presuming caprices."

"I submit. Haroun will walk quietly beside

your triumphal car ;” said Otterford laughingly, as he bent low over the neck of his beautiful Arabian, which made a mute reply to his caresses. “ Only promise that when you alight, you will not issue orders to your seneschal to shut the gates upon me as I gain the boundary of Eden.”

My mother, half pleased and half annoyed, smiled again ; and then, throwing herself back in the corner of the carriage, closed her eyes, and affected to renew her reverie. She had, nevertheless, not only no fear, but not even the most vague suspicion of Otterford’s real principles ; but she was proud. She believed, in her heart of hearts, that she had never been degraded by the most idle breath of calumny. She felt satisfied that she was perfectly irreproachable. How could it be otherwise ? She was constantly in a crowd. She admitted no *tête-à-tête* ; and, therefore, if men of fashion chose to *afficher* themselves as her admirers under the eyes of the public, the fault was wholly their own, and she had nothing whatever to do with it. She was, herself, perpetually *en evidence* ; made no mysteries ; encouraged no *penchants* ; maintained her own dignity ; never uttered a word of which her husband might not have been an auditor ; and — consequently — she defied the world !

It is to be supposed that my mother did not

probe her conscience too deeply. All operations are irksome and painful; and a self-inflicted smart is never a favourite amusement with any of us. How then could it be imagined that a young and flattered beauty would submit to writhe beneath such unprofitable and uninviting penance? And yet—as she remembered that she was on the brink of a lengthened *tête-à-tête* with Otterford amid the solitude of her suburban villa, visions of a score of Mrs. Grundys, with mob-caps and ruffles, sharp eyes, and shrill voices, rose upon her mental perception with appalling distinctness. But in the next instant she felt a contempt for her own weakness. Was she to suffer the idle and ignorant gossipry of a few ill-natured, and (what was worse still) ill-bred women, to control her movements, and to decide upon her motives? She replied to her own question by a laugh of mockery.

And in five minutes more they reached the villa.

“Never was there a more charming device than this marble basin filled with lilac lotus, Lady Madelaine;” said Otterford, when he had handed my mother from the carriage, and, arm in arm, they had reached the river-front of the house: “to me, a lawn like a green baize cloth, without ornament or relief of any kind, is as insipid as a water *suchet*, or your dear friend, Devereux’s wife.”

“H-u-m,” intonated my mother; “I cannot quite

agree to the position. A handsome lawn is always an agreeable object, and perfectly harmless, at all events."

"I stand corrected;" said the gentleman with mock gravity; "and beg to rescind my second comparison; for, according to your more correct view of the case, it does not by any means apply."

"Which object did it involve?" asked my mother laughingly; "the fish, or the lady?"

"I am compelled to confess to the *bella e cara*."

"Surely you do not attempt to imply that Lady Devereux—"

"Is a woman, and a withering beauty? Yes, I do. And did you, fair lady, ever know one such fraction of society who was not a viper? If you can conscientiously lay your hand upon your heart and say 'Yes,' then will I tell you, what, before such an avowal, I believe to be an utter impossibility, and—"

"And that is—?"

"That you can really be in error, as well as the rest of your sex."

The lady blushed, and said "Pshaw!" but she nevertheless accepted the compliment very calmly; and as she seated herself under a willow, and motioned her companion to a chair beside her, she remarked quietly; "I cannot account for the fact,

but it is certain that you never did like poor Lady Devereux."

"Do *you* consider it remarkable that such should have been the case?" asked the gentleman, gathering up half a dozen loose stones from the gravel, and throwing them, at regular and slow intervals, into the water.

"Most assuredly I do. She is so general a favourite."

"There was a time when that circumstance alone would have sufficed to make me detest a woman," was the incorrigible reply.

"How truly absurd!"

"Shall I tell you to whom I am indebted for having cured me of the said absurdity?"

"You had better not, if it be a secret. You know the proverb, '*Se il segreto è confidato, non è più segreto.*'"

"Ha, indeed! is that your creed?" demanded the gentleman, somewhat maliciously; "I must in that case answer you by another; '*Chi ben serra, ben apre.*'"

"I do not understand you."

"No! and yet it is as fair Italian as your own."

My mother bit her lip, and turned aside. She felt displeased, although she scarcely knew wherefore.

"Then you do not care to learn my mystery?" pursued her companion.

“It can be matter of interest only to yourself;” was the chilling reply.

“True, very true;” said Otterford bitterly; “I was to blame to imagine that it could be subject of concern to any other person; and I should also have remembered that I am now too old to play the coxcomb gracefully.”

Lady Madelaine was no whit appeased. On the contrary, she became more irritable and uneasy than before.

“And yet, it is just possible”—continued Otterford. “Do not mistake me, Lady Madelaine; I simply say it is just possible—that, in the present instance, you may not have altogether pronounced an absolute verity. Indeed, I venture to affirm that, in this particular case, you have assuredly not done so; for it is to yourself that I am indebted for emancipation from this unjust and ungenerous prejudice.”

“To me, my lord! You surely jest.”

“By no means. At a moment like the present, when all my words are taken *au grand sérieux*, I want courage to presume so far.”

“You are actually childish,” said my mother, forcing a smile.

“I trust that childhood is too happy an age to know the miserable feeling with which I last spoke.”

“Again I repeat, Otterford,” said Lady Madelaine, hurriedly, but less coldly, “that I do not understand you.”

“I begin to fear that you have never done so.”

“You are really inexplicable to-day — a perfect sphynx. You profess to love the country, while you make, in truth, a miserable Celadon.”

“Is that my fault?”

“Most decidedly. Am I to blame for this, also?”

“I adopt your own words—most decidedly.”

“You really put me beyond my patience.”

“You have long tried the same experiment upon me.”

Lady Madelaine gasped for breath. What could this mean? She felt that she was crimson; something told her that she ought to be displeased; and she was intuitively conscious that she should at once terminate so singular a dialogue. She did not hesitate for a moment. She had, unfortunately, ordered luncheon as she alighted; and she saw at once that she had no plausible pretext for leaving the house without partaking of it; for she shrank from the idea that Otterford should suspect her alarm; and accordingly she rose as he ceased speaking, and complaining that the river-breeze had affected her head, proposed that they

should return to take some refreshment, and order the carriage.

The gentleman obeyed, without uttering a syllable ; and, gravely offering his arm, they passed through the French doors into the dining-room, in utter silence.

The movement of my mother was as natural as it was ill-judged. In her anxiety to escape from a continuance of so inauspicious a dialogue, she forgot that the seat upon which she had originally placed herself partially protected her : she could only be verbally annoyed, overlooked as was the lawn from the river on one side, and by the windows of the villa on the other ; whereas, by entering the house, she rendered the solitude of her position infinitely more decided. If she were blinded to this fact by her increasing agitation, it is not, however, to be supposed that her companion was so completely a novice as to be so likewise. He did not attempt to controvert the abruptness of her resolution, for which mark of consideration towards her she felt grateful ; and she almost began to doubt if she had not been deceived by her own fears. She accordingly seated herself at the table with more calmness and self-possession than she had expected ; and, during the attendance of the servants, sustained a desultory conversation with her chance-guest with very commendable indifference. This was, how-

ever, fated to be somewhat shaken by the intelligence that her coachman had discovered a loose shoe upon one of the horses, which it was necessary to secure before her return to town. Instinctively, in her first vexation, she glanced towards Otterford; but he did not appear to have even heard the *sotto voce* communication of the servant. He was busily employed in arranging a number of bread-crumbs which had been scattered beside his plate into a variety of miniature ramparts, extremely ingenious and imaginative.

This, at least, was consoling; and Lady Madeline, having desired that all possible haste might be made, saw the man depart without any visible feeling of misgiving. She nevertheless retained her seat at the table, and for a moment remained silent; but, conscious of the awkwardness of such a silence at such a time, she suddenly affected great interest in the elaborate invention of the impromptu professor of fortification.

“I was not aware,” she said hurriedly, anxious only to break the stillness, “that you were so skilful a master of the art of defence.”

“It has long been necessary for me to encourage the study;” replied Otterford, raising his large, earnest eyes to her face; “for during the last—I was about to say, fifteen years, but I dare not, as it would involve others besides myself—I have con-

stantly been called upon to defend myself against misconstructions, disappointments, cold hearts, and malicious tongues."

"You really make me smile;" said Lady Madelaine, forcing a poor attempt at raillery,—“You who are so thoroughly the *enfant gâté* of the world—that were it not for half a dozen individuals, who have evinced sufficient moral courage to doubt your perfectibility, you would at this moment be little better than unbearable."

"I am greatly indebted to their very kindly exertions;" was the retort; "and am possibly the most so to your ladyship for the formation of so notable a *clique* of critics."

"By no means. I only joined their ranks."

"From some well-reasoned conviction, I have no doubt; and perhaps with more cause than many who have enrolled themselves."

"I complain of nothing very heinous."

"And yet, upon consideration, you might have done so."

"I wished to be a generous opponent, and the more so, that I was conscious of being in a minority."

"I would much rather that you had shown resentment than cowardice."

"Resentment?"

"Even so. Do you remember, Lady Madelaine, that I have known you for seventeen years?"

“ Perfectly. Can no modern philosopher discover a means of staying the progress of time ? ”

“ Can you recall the period,” pursued the gentleman, regardless of the question ; “ when you made your first appearance in society under the guardianship of that paragon of chaperones, Lady Sinclair, with a face and form which set competition at defiance, and a heart as proud as it was pure ? You may have forgotten it, but I never shall.”

“ And am I to resent your having known me at that happy time ? ”

“ Yes, and no : in one respect you dare not hold me in displeasure, for you are well aware that I no sooner saw you than I became your devoted slave.”

“ A romantic appellation truly for the partner of a drawing-room flirtation ! ”

“ You are not ingenuous, Lady Madelaine Tilden ; did your clever and careful aunt permit such ‘ drawing-room flirtations,’ save where she thoroughly approved the possible results ? I think not. Thus far I have, I trust, proved that I was worthy of your notice—of your friendship—of your companionship—for I was fully conscious of the value of the privilege which had been accorded to me ; but although I enjoyed it long and intimately, and although I had not hesitated to *afficher* myself as the devoted slave (for I persist in maintaining my *personage*) of the new idol ; still, on the death

of Lady Sinclair, Reginald Otterford went on the continent—a bachelor; and the *Marguerite des Marguerites* returned to the Highlands—Lady Madelaine Glenfillan.”

“My lord, you astonish me!” said my mother haughtily.

“Nay, nay; believe me that you mistake the term: I only *remind* you; nor should you take offence at the frank confession which I am making of my sins. Look you! I have levelled one of my outworks in token of a first defeat. You had every reason and every right to expect an explanation at my hands.”

“I am at a loss to know to what climax such a conversation, or almost, I might say, such a monologue as the present, is to tend?”

“Simply to my own self-justification.”

“It is perfectly needless, my lord. Nothing had ever passed your lips by which I was entitled to believe that you considered yourself compromised; nor had I ever given you the slightest reason to infer that you were otherwise than perfectly indifferent to myself.”

Her companion quietly shook his head, as he again, with great composure, fixed his eyes upon hers, which were flaming with insulted pride; and there was a strangely withering intonation in his voice, as he said—“You do not do yourself justice

by such an assertion. Custom has placed a padlock upon the lips of women, of which society keeps the key ; but custom, and convention, and even policy itself, can do no more than this, while human beings possess eyes, and hearts, and preferences. Either I was then beloved, or you were not the pure being before whom I poured out my worship ; and this I will not think. No, no—you could not at that early age have been a callous, cold, and calculating coquette—one of those heartless and selfish triflers with the happiness of others, who have studied to a nicety how far they may make a traffic of a man's feelings with safety to themselves. I would not overthrow the bright and beautiful visions of seventeen years to embrace so foul a creed for all my future hopes in life. You loved me, then, or there is no truth in nature ! ”

My mother silently laid her hand upon a silver bell beside her. She could not trust herself to speak. The summons was instantly answered, and her inquiry for the carriage met by the information that the horse had not yet returned from the village forge. Poor Lady Madelaine was not aware that the groom of Lord Otterford always obeyed the directions of his noble master to the letter, and that he had accordingly subdued all symptoms of undue impatience on the part of her ladyship's coachman in a way which did him honour.

They were once more alone ; and then, and not till then, the gentleman resumed the thread of his discourse.

“ This point conceded, then ; for, in order to cast the responsibility of this cold parting wholly upon me, it is necessary that it should be so ; may I not, in extenuation of my self-abnegatory offence, explain the cause which induced me to silence where inclination, tenderness, and honour appeared to exact an explanation ? ”

“ It were worse than idle to impose so ungracious a task upon you ; ” said my mother bitterly. “ It was my want of fortune. ”

“ Say rather that it was my own ; ” interposed Otterford ; “ that it was my poverty—my debts—which closed my lips, and only left me the more keenly susceptible of my own uncalculating and egregious folly ! Still, something whispered me that we should meet again, and I fled from London in order to retrench, and give myself room for hope when that meeting came. We did meet again ; ” and a disdainful smile played for an instant round his proud lips ;—“ but how ? ”

“ Surely, my lord, ” gasped my mother, “ you have forgotten that I am a wife ! ”

“ Forgotten it ! ” exclaimed Otterford, as he started from his chair, and began to pace the room with hasty and uneven steps. “ Can I forget my own

vitality? Can I forget that I have flung the whole tide of my affections on the thirsty sands? I pray you not to mock me by such a supposition."

"What am I to reply to rhapsodies like these?" faltered my mother. "You take an ungenerous advantage of our momentary seclusion, of which I have ever hitherto believed you incapable. Once more let me enjoin you to remember that I am a wife."

"You are," said her companion, pausing immediately beside her; "you are—The haughty and high-born daughter of Lord Glenfillan—the star of fashion—the beloved of all—the fair prize which so many were eager to win and wear—had woven out a new and erratic destiny for herself before our second meeting came. The peer's daughter had become the wife of an obscure and nameless—(for he was nameless then at least)—of an obscure and nameless commoner—the bright star had shot downward through the heavens—the idol had overthrown her own shrine—the prize had been awarded, none could understand wherefore, until the name of Lady Madelaine Tilden was to be seen written in diamonds and gold-dust in every resort of luxury and fashion. And yet—although I knew this—although I was compelled to admit it to my own heart, still—" and, as he suffered the apparent mortification of his disappointment to

carry him along by its impetuous violence, he possessed himself of my mother's hand: "still was I fated to remain the victim of my blighted and unlucky passion. And now—now—when I have suffered the long martyrdom of years—when I have, if not patiently, at least guardedly, lived within the spell of your resistless influence, with all my old hopes, and aspirations still clinging closely about my spirit—even now, will you not acquit me of either word, or look, or action, calculated to pain you?"

"I could have done so this morning."

"And have you not pronounced your own condemnation by thus acquitting me? Can you venture to assert that you feel no self-reproach at having permitted the perpetual worship of a devoted heart without one quickening pulse? without one grateful feeling? It cannot be—it shall not be—" and still retaining the captive hand, he flung himself on his knees before his quailing and speechless victim; "By heaven! you have long known and understood the impulse upon which I acted: you offered no resistance to the exclusiveness of my attentions—either your heart or your vanity has spoken loudly for me, and I will not believe that it could be so pitiful an influence as the last, upon which you coldly saw fit to hinge my destiny. Why, then, noble and high-hearted woman! do you thus, year

after year, persist in playing the tyrant and the prude, when—”

“ Enough, sir, enough—” exclaimed my mother in a shrill whisper, and with quivering lips as white as the hand which she proudly withdrew from his clasp ; “ you have said more than enough. I am sufficiently humbled. I have mistaken both you and myself. I will utter no reproach—I can find none which would suffice for so cruel and cowardly an attack. We meet henceforth as strangers ; and I now spurn you as I would cast a foul reptile from the folds of my veil.”

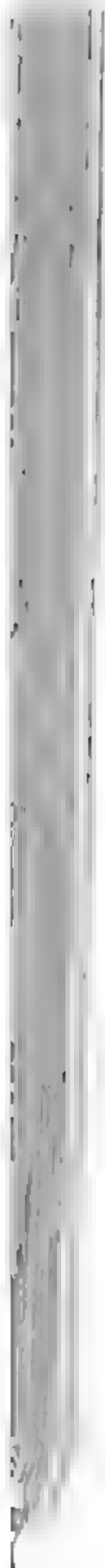
As she ceased speaking, Lady Madelaine prepared to pass into the garden, a movement which her companion sprang from his knee to prevent ; and as she was in the act of placing her foot on the gravel, he seized her arm, exclaiming : “ Do not hope it, madam, we part not thus—”

“ Fie—for shame, my lord ;” said the lady, as she paused, and looked upon him with an eye as cold as stone, and a contemptuous smile, which made his pulses beat with liquid fire ; “ have you *no* mercy upon an unprotected woman ? Am I to be subjected also to violence under my own roof ?”

There was a majesty in the magnificent beauty and suppressed indignation of my mother, which did not fail in its effect even upon her dissolute

companion. Without another effort to detain her he removed his grasp ; and, bowing stiffly, followed her to the water's edge, where they stood for a few instants side by side in perfect silence ; and it was probably no slight relief to either when Lady Madelaine's carriage was announced. Lord Otterford assisted her to enter it with as much care and courtesy as he had shown on all former occasions ; and then, haughtily raising his hat, he vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off in the direction of London ; while my mother, burying herself as much as possible among her cushions, gave free way to her pent-up feelings, and wept bitterly.

END OF VOL. I.



THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

BY
MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF
"THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," ETC.

At sixteen, she came out; presented, vaunted,
She put all coronets into commotion;
At seventeen, too, the world was still enchanted
With the new Venus of their brilliant ocean;
At eighteen, though below her feet still panted
A hecatomb of suitors with devotion,
She had consented to create again
That Adam called "the happiest of men."
BYRON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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[illegible]

THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

It is really curious, in after-life, to look back upon the various incidents by which our past existence has been diversified, and even governed in its great outline, or by which its interests have been involved so inextricably as to have operated even upon our most sacred and secret relations ; and then to weave their antecedents and their results into its chequered web, with the aid of time and experience. Episodes, incomprehensible at the moment of their introduction, fall quite naturally into their places during these reminiscient reveries, although they appeared at the instant of their occurrence alike extraneous and impertinent ; and events, once considered as extraordinary and altogether gratuitous, prove to have been only the

natural result of a certain line of conduct, and a certain succession of ideas, and to form no more than a regular link in the great chain of calculation and expediency.

But enough of such reflections as these, which only serve to sadden the writer and to weary the reader, without making either the one or the other a jot the wiser. They might be all very well at the time of our great-grandfathers, when people had much more leisure—when gentlemen made out their wills before journeying from York to London, and despatched bulletins of health to their anxious families at the close of every longer stage than usual—when ladies made one piece of tapestrywork extend over a whole life—and young men served, like Jacob, seven years for their wives. Then, indeed, a grave thought or a serious apophthegm might have been welcome, *pour passer le temps*; but it is not so with us; we, who are incessantly running after him, to hold him back, and seldom clutching even a single feather for our pains. Such being the case, I will at once resume my narrative.

By the way, this allusion to the said narrative reminds me that I ought to congratulate myself upon my original resolve to declare myself guiltless of all design to perpetrate a novel. I never had any such intention. I could not have done so if I would. I have attempted nothing beyond my

own personal history—and surely, fair ladies and formidable critics, I have a right to do that as I please? Nevertheless, I will pledge my faith willingly to be as veracious as a traveller, as conscientious as a money-lender, as self-denying as an alderman, and as prudent as a newly-emancipated heir: and having volunteered thus much, let the ladies and the critics quarrel with me—if they can.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that I knew nothing of the adventure related in the last chapter for years after its occurrence; and I was comparatively astonished by the receipt of a letter from my mother, which followed closely upon that of Mr. Tilden, to announce her intention of being his companion to Rooksley; in order, as she said, to welcome the new-comers, and to judge by her own observation, in how far I had myself profited by the salutary solitude to which she had found it necessary to subject me, with a view to the correction of my unfortunately imperious and overbearing temper. Had I been aware at the time of the actual cause of Lady Madelaine's sudden solicitude, and her anxiety to absent herself from town, it is probable that I should have been very differently affected.

“Here is a letter from our mother;” I said carelessly, as I laid it, open as it was, beside my sister. “Read it: you will doubtlessly find it amusing;

and it will also gratify you to ascertain how perfectly your own quiet and reserved temperament will suit her. I quite prophecy already an alliance, both offensive and defensive. Only," I added, as I turned to leave the room ; " I have one serious counsel to give you — be careful not to grow any taller !" And with these words, uttered with a laugh which expressed far more bitterness than pleasantry, I disappeared.

Lady Madelaine had adopted any other than a judicious mode of improving my natural disposition. She had commenced upon a wrong system, and she had persevered in her error year after year with a tenacious fidelity, as little creditable to herself as it was mortifying to me. I was determined to show her this ; and I could discover no method more effectual of so doing than that of exhibiting her letter to whomsoever might be supposed to take any interest in its contents. It was too late for me to be brow-beaten into reformation. She had herself made a woman of the child, and the work of her own hands could not now be undone.

In about half an hour, Adela returned the letter through the hands of my maid, carefully enclosed in an envelope, which I immediately re-directed and despatched to Lady Flora, as a solace to her sick room : it was a becoming attention on my part ; and as it was the first which I had found

occasion to offer her, I had no doubt whatever of its being properly appreciated. On her return from her mission, charged with the acknowledgments of the interesting invalid, Joséphine made me her compliment on the happy intelligence contained in the letter of *miladi*. I inquired upon what premises she presumed that its contents were so hyperagreeable, when she *naïvely* replied that she had inferred as much from the eagerness with which Lady Flora had possessed herself of the packet, and the pleasure which beamed in the eyes of Mademoiselle Adèle, *qui gagnoit étonnamment à cette petite mine éveillée*.

For a moment I had a sore struggle with myself. There could be no doubt of the correctness of Joséphine's report, simply because she could have no motive in the present instance to suspect that my sister was triumphing in what she supposed to be my mortification ; and for a few instants I *was* mortified ; less at the ungenerous amusement of so near a relative than at the idea that Lady Flora Glenfillan, the object of my supreme contempt and dislike, was the partner of her pastime. I was at first tempted to regret my mode of proceeding, and to blame myself for not having simply announced the approaching advent of my mother, without ampliation or comment of any kind ; but this was a mere transitory weakness, which my pride soon enabled me to

conquer. I had a higher aim than that of striving to shine in the eyes of a Lady Flora. She was to be my companion for months — perhaps for years. The trial for mastery between us had commenced on the very evening of her arrival. I felt, moreover, that I must brave the combat alone ; while she had a staunch and a subtle ally in my sister, and might, for aught that I could determine, soon find a second in my own friend, Lady O'Halloran, whose leaning towards Adela had already become palpable ; but, although it may be true enough, as a general principle, that *il pesce grossa divorà il piccolo*, still I was conscious of a power within myself which would, in every case, preserve me from the risk of becoming so very small a fish as to move among my adversaries without troubling the water.

All these thoughts swept rapidly through my brain, and my resolution was instantly taken. I at once felt that I must be consistent, or my cause was lost ; and accordingly I again despatched my *soubrette* to Lady Flora's apartment, to request the restoration of the letter, which I was anxious to forward, without loss of time, to Lady O'Halloran, lest the expected visit of my mother should interfere with any of her arrangements. As I had foreseen, my message created what is, in the present day, denominated a "great sensation." The invalid insisted that Joséphine had committed some

grand mistake. "It was no' that possible," she declared, "that the lassie could purpose to do ony-thing sae awfu'! Why, it was a clean shaming o' her own proudfu' nature—and she would advise her—"

What the valuable counsel would have been, and in what degree it might have operated upon my determination, it is impossible to decide, as the hand of my sister, pressed heavily upon the arm of the eager orator, arrested her utterance at the critical moment; while, in a calm and low tone, she said quietly, "Forgive me, my dear aunt; but had Eveleen believed that she required advice upon this extraordinary occasion, she would, in all probability, have asked it of yourself. She has not done so: and believe me, that it is far too good to be flung away, as it most decidedly would be, in this case."

"A' weel, a' weel," replied the aunt; "'wilfu' woman maun ha' her way,' as the poet says. Give the lass the letter, and geud luck go wi' it! It's a rampaging scrawl, to say the best of it."

In five minutes it was on its way to the Hall.

The morrow was the day appointed for my own visit to the kind-hearted widow, but I had ceased to look forward to it with pleasure. Like the skeleton of the Egyptian banquets, the presence of my incomprehensible sister would suffice, as I well knew, to

poison my enjoyment. It was to me like the coupling of the dead man and the living one in the German story ; and the simile was the more perfect that Adela appeared wholly heedless or unconscious of the annoyance of our compulsatory union ; while to myself it was hateful. Had I possessed one feeling or sentiment in common with my sister, I might have looked forward to brighter and better times ; but, unhappily, the solitary sympathy which had ever existed between us had served only to sunder us in heart and spirit. We had each been brought up to despise the other — our earliest jealousies had taken the same direction, and had been quickened and nourished until they had become as bitter as the waters of Marah, and as numerous as the sands of the African desert. In my own case, other feelings no less hostile had blended themselves with this first principle of future hate. My sister had always been described to me by the autocrats of the nursery and the schoolroom in negatives. She was not handsome ; she was not accomplished ; she was not fashionable ; she was a mere wild, sun-freckled, ignorant child of the hills, without either *tournure* or pretensions.

At first I was shocked, and even sorry for the poor neglected girl ; then I proceeded to hope that she would remain at Glenfillan all her life, lest by approaching town, and undergoing the inspection

of my mother's "set," she should disgrace not only herself, but me. And why could she not remain there? Glenfillan might almost be considered her birth-place. At all events, it was her home, and it would be so easy for her to marry *there*! With her name, and her fortune, she could assuredly captivate some Highland chief, with a kilt, and a cock's feather in his bonnet, who would forgive her want of beauty in consideration of the "siller;" and never be aware of her want of education. Decidedly she had no business in England. This was the second phase of my vision; but the third was not slow in its succession. Adela might have no partiality for kilts and cock's feathers; and, as she grew older, might be inconsiderate enough to assert her rights; and as in dear, righteous old England, there are no convents for the reception of refractory young ladies, the claim could not ultimately be neglected. In this case, she *must* appear in the world—she *must* share at once both my aristocratic home and my brilliant destiny—that is, in as far as, under all her disadvantages, the world would permit her to do so; and this reflection was to me insufferable.

loving heart ; but my affections had either be trifled with, or repulsed—and yet not altogether so, for to two persons, at least, I had been dear, my father and Emily Vernon ; but of the first had seen far too little to be enabled to return to appreciate his tenderness, while the considerable kindness of poor Emily had been circumscribed by the tyranny of my mother. Under these circumstances, my best and holiest feelings had been flung back upon me ; and, profiting by the example continually before my eyes, young as I was, I had taken refuge in coquetry ; and my reader is already aware that I trifled with this new pastime until subjected myself to severe mortification ; and became, moreover, conscious that it had left behind it a deeper feeling of regret and tenderness in my own bosom than I could easily shake off, even had I endeavoured to overcome it, which was far from being the case. I have said nothing for a long time of Devereux ; but it must not be supposed that I had forgotten him. It was the only romantic page in the little volume of my life ; and dwelt upon it unceasingly.

Poor commonplace probability waged but unequal war against my girlish vanity ; I would not believe it possible that he had forgotten me. I must soon be released from my present state of exile, and produced in the world. My mother and Lady

Devereux were still inseparable ; and it was consequently evident that our renewed meeting could not be prevented for ever. It was a subject of unceasing regret to me that I had no one to whom I could speak of him, and to whom I could explain all the energy and constancy of my feelings. I was too proud to make a confidante of Joséphine ; I dared not venture to trust the sympathy of Lady O'Halloran, for she would, in all probability, have made a jest of my anxiety, and even considered it her duty to lay the matter before my father. I was utterly and hopelessly alone with my secret ; and it weighed the more heavily upon my heart in consequence.

My sister ? Ay, there indeed I might have found a friend, a counsellor, a confidante, had she been any other than Miss Adela Tilden ; but, under the present circumstances, there was no prospect of such a solace.

Never was gray-haired matron more impracticable than my sister ; cold, silent, and self-centered, there was not a grain of romance in her composition. She had never, since her arrival, displaced a single novel on the shelves ; her conversation was a string of axioms and aphorisms ; Pygmalion might have worn out all his tools upon her, and she never would have breathed, though his impious daring had wrapped the world in flames.

Still, despite these reflections and convictions the idea continued to haunt me. Adela was young, and a young heart is naturally so prone to take an interest in every history of affection. No one who could say that such a confidence as this might not lessen the distance between us! Thus argued my eager inclination to ease my overburthened heart by sharing its load with another; and accordingly I began to watch my sister closely, in order to encourage every glimmering manifestation of feeling or interest on her part; but I might as well have awaited light and fire from the piled-up ashes of an extinguished conflagration. Sometimes I became angry with myself for being so weak as to anticipate such a result—at others I pitied my impassability, and felt that no lute could sound until its chords were struck; and this, in Adela's case, was clearly impossible.

In this wavering mood of mind I was prepared to sacrifice my own feelings and ideas during our visit to the Hall, to which I have already alluded; and I so far succeeded in at least accomplishing this concealment, that on our departure thence, La O'Halloran drew me apart, and warmly congratulated me upon the victory which I had obtained over myself in my altered and less authoritative manner towards my sister.

"Depend upon it, my dear child," she said

warmly, "you are working out your own happiness as well as hers. How shall I rejoice the affectionate and anxious feelings of your father by this joyful intelligence ! Your heart is good, Eveleen ; it must suffer from your errors, for I am perfectly convinced that you are quite conscious of them, even at the very moment of their committal ; you owe them rather to your age, and to your peculiar education, than to your nature. In order to be all for which you were originally intended, my love, let me now intreat you to make a yet mightier effort over yourself than you have even done within these last few weeks ; abjure, and not only abjure, but repair them all. Open up the treasures of your really loving heart to Adela. You will one day learn how precious a treasure is the affection of an only sister. Yours has a thousand good qualities ; but, even if she had a thousand faults, so that they were merely involuntary, and that she regretted them when committed, you should consider yourself only the more compelled to sustain and comfort her. Come, my dear Eveleen, and promise me, here in my arms, and upon my heart, that you will use all your most tender influence to make her happy. From what you tell me, and from what I had myself ascertained, her guardian-aunt is ill-calculated to be either an appropriate companion or a judicious guide. You have it in your power to be both. Be

to her then a fond sister and a firm friend. You will do this, will you not ?”

“ Alas ! you seek to compel me to a Herculean task ;” I said sadly ; “ would she only meet me half way, I should have courage to make the attempt.”

“ In that case it would require none ;” insisted my warm-hearted monitress ; “ but you expect success too soon. Redouble your attempts to overcome her coldness, and your merit will only be the greater when it is conquered : that she will resist it resolutely for a time assure yourself, for you must feel that the poor child has much to forgive.”

“ But not to forgive me, Lady O’Halloran ?”

“ You are in error, Eveleen. Are not all the preferences—all the outlay—all the cares which have been so profusely lavished upon yourself, and so grudgingly bestowed upon her—all the superiority which you have assumed—are these not wrongs in which you have, voluntarily as well as involuntarily, borne a part ? and are not these likely to fester in a young, fresh heart, unconscious of evil ? I have no doubt she has made you feel that she has not borne them all without a pang. Such conduct would have been sublime, and who would dare to expect sublimity from a girl of thirteen years of age ? I am equally convinced that she will be long, very long, before she can overcome their withering effects, or cease to show you that they still rankle

in her mind ; but this should only stimulate you to greater concessions ; and remember that it is the province of the happy to heal the wounds of those who suffer, and that the sufferer should be met by kindness, forbearance, and the most delicate demonstrations of affection."

As she ceased speaking, Lady O'Halloran embraced me affectionately, while I wept from a mingled feeling which I did not seek to analyze. This judicious friend affected to mistake the motive of my emotion ; she congratulated me upon my worthy sympathy in the past sorrows of my sister, and my evident intention to terminate them ; and then hastily but clearly explained to me the line of conduct which she would advise me to pursue. I whispered out my determination to follow it up to the letter upon her bosom, making but one reservation.

"Permit me only, my dear friend," I said hurriedly, "to leave everything in its present state, and to make no demonstration, until after the visit of our parents. When we are again alone, I will apply myself resolutely to this formidable, and, I fear, hopeless undertaking."

"I can admit of no such moral cowardice, my Eveleen ;" was her calm reply ; "every hour of supineness is an hour lost, which you may, hereafter, bitterly regret. I will not give you a day's

respite—not an hour's. The ascendancy which you will have gained over yourself and your own egotism, before the arrival of Lady Madelaine and Mr. Tilden, will strengthen you to re-commence a trial, which will be no longer in its first infancy. Their visit may be delayed, even deferred ; in short, trust not to circumstances in so holy a duty, but to yourself."

Her firmness, aided by my own secret wish, determined me at once. I was, moreover, greatly agitated at the moment ; nor could I bear to let her feel that I was less generous than she had believed. I accordingly withdrew my opposition, and promised all she wished.

My first attempts at conciliation and friendship were not, however, successful. Adela was too farsighted to believe for an instant that I had so suddenly changed my nature. She suspected a snare, or at least imagined a weakness and inconsistency of character which irritated her, and put her upon the defensive. Every look of kindness which I turned upon her she studiously avoided ; my most conciliatory words were unanswered, or only induced a reply so cold, and dry, and formal, that it froze me to the soul ; while, by a strange coincidence, I became in my turn embarrassed and timid in her presence, and divested myself unconsciously of my natural arrogance. However much

I might gain in the opinion of a third person by this extraordinary transformation, it never produced even a momentary effect upon Adela, while it made me absolutely unhappy. I did not know myself. I had not even the consolation of feeling that I was doing right, for I was burthened with the everlasting consciousness that my present conduct sprang from no impulse, was actuated by no principle of my own; but that I was a mere puppet, and that the wires by which I was moved were in the hands of another. I was nothing more than an awkward and inexperienced actress, saying what was "set down for me," and constrained at every instance to sacrifice myself to the part which I represented.

Often did I indulge in bitter reveries on my extraordinary and irksome position. Often did I repeat to myself that *ogni medaglia ha il suo rovescio*. I was undergoing this moral misery, to reclaim the heart of Adela. But would it consent to be reclaimed? Would it ever exchange its haughty indifference for the thralldom of a sister's regard? And, alas! seldom, very seldom, could I compel myself to answer, 'yes.' Why, then, should I any longer tamely undergo this martyrdom, which made me a stranger even in my home? I can scarcely answer the question. Suffice it, that I remembered my promise to Lady O'Halloran, and also that I had never yet compelled myself to any

measure in which my pride had suffered me to fail through my own weakness.

This remark reminds me, that the letter of Lady Madelaine, which I had forwarded to the Hall, had been received by its mistress with a full appreciation of the feeling which had induced me to send it. She well knew my haughty disposition, and that I would rather brave the little world about me than shun its blame. She first chided me jestingly, but took an after-opportunity of pointing out the danger and impolicy of such a proceeding, and earnestly entreated me never to repeat it.

Had I only possessed such a friend a few years earlier!—But, alas! this is an implied excuse for my past faults, which at the present day I should be too proud and too just to make. Let me rather remember in my old age, that, whatever may have been the errors of those around me, I was, nevertheless, my own worst enemy. It is so easy to imitate when both egotism and vanity are gratified by the mimicry.

But, to recur for a moment to my new state of existence, I can, upon looking back, frankly declare my conviction, that either my health or my will must have yielded before the stoicism of my sister and my own internal struggle, had it been fated to endure much longer. It was not—it was fearfully and fatally abridged!

CHAPTER III.

Time, meanwhile, continued its heavy course. Day after day sank into night. Lady Flora had declared herself, at last, to be convalescent ; and descended to the drawing-room, closely enveloped in the Glenfillan tartan, to the great amusement of that portion of the establishment whom she dignified by the appellation of “ the flunkies.” Nor had she made her second appearance without a firm resolution to assert her privileges as the temporary mistress of the mansion. Her orders and her lectures, ere long, became infinite. For a time I ventured to oppose her distasteful and ungentlewomanly innovations, but she met me with the glance of a vixen, and the accents of a shrew, and against these I could not condescend to contend. I then ventured upon expostulation, but my failure was signal ; and after these efforts to save the respectability of poor Rooksley, I abstained from all comment or expostulation, to the great astonish-

ment and manifest disappointment of Lady Flora, who had evidently anticipated a long and exciting course of domestic warfare.

Before the arrival of Lady Madelaine's Scotch connection, I had been constantly annoyed by intimations from the housekeeper that the under-servants were, one and all, threatening to leave my father's service, unless they were allowed at stated periods to replace those in town—the quiet uniformity of Rooksley not suiting either their volatile spirits or their social habits. These terrible announcements had, as will be believed, never disturbed my equanimity for a moment. My universal reply was expressive of the necessity of their communicating their discontents to Mr. Tilden; and for a time I had heard no more of the kitchen rebellions. Now, however, the case was indeed changed—there was no more stagnation in the house. Lady Flora commenced by papering and bagging up every remain of ornamental furniture left in Rooksley. She even invaded the apartments of my father; but I no sooner discovered this, than causing every remnant of rag and paper with which she had desecrated them to be instantly removed, I turned the master-key which gave admittance to the whole suite, and never again suffered it to pass from my own possession.

So far, the Rooksley servants cared little for the

innovations of Lady Flora, who now appeared to be really in her element ; the only person who was annoyed and inconvenienced being myself ; for Adela sat by, perfectly unmoved, like one accustomed to similar proceedings, and for whom they possessed neither interest nor hindrance. But when, having made everything about her wear as wretched an appearance as it was capable of assuming, the thrifty Scotch lady condescended to descend to the servants' hall to commence her reformation in that privileged department, matters at once became desperate. She had already once or twice been heard to mutter between her teeth at the dinner-table something about " awfu' extravagance ;" and consequently the whole establishment, each being interested in the question, were fully prepared for the assault. Lady Flora talked loud, but the housekeeper talked still louder, and precisely at the same moment, and consequently no one heard a syllable of the noble maiden's harangue. When she sought to enter the butler's sanctum, he accidentally let a basket of plate fall upon her right foot, which, from some cause or other, was peculiarly susceptible to contact with any hard substance ; and, while she was leaning against the wall, and writhing with pain, he quickly locked the door of the room, and, putting the key in his pocket, walked away.

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When the victim of his obstinacy had in some degree recovered from the shock she had received, she next attempted an inroad upon the kitchen, where she was received by the cook bearing a greasy spit, with which, as she crossed the floor, she brushed violently against her unwelcome visitor ; but the Glenfillan tartan was proof against all such unctuous contact ; and the resolute spinster stood her ground, until men and maids rushed in a phalanx through the open door ; and the unfortunate reformer was so unmercifully hustled, jostled, and run over, that she was glad to make good her retreat to her legitimate sphere of action.

I shall never forget her when she re-entered. I dare not venture to describe her appearance. Suffice it that I burst into an involuntary fit of laughter so undisguised and so genuine, that I believe it obtained for me her life-long hatred. My sister looked at her for a moment without the movement of a muscle, and then calmly continued her work.

Habit is assuredly all-powerful, or I am convinced that Adela, stoic as she seemed, must have laughed as I did at the comical effects of Lady Flora's foray.

Baffled, but not defeated, the resolute lady returned on the morrow to the charge ; but, as she had, on the first onslaught, encountered such bitter perils, she saw fit, on her second essay, to remember

that "discretion is the better part of valour;" and feeling, no doubt, that the pantries and sculleries were hopelessly closed against her, she assumed a more dignified position, and summoned the delinquent housekeeper to the breakfast-room, where she was duly apprised that Lady Flora would, in future, herself regulate the supplies of both the upper and lower tables; and that Mrs. Locksley must be responsible for all additional outlay which might occur from her want of obedience to the mandate issued for her observance. The worthy soul looked absolutely petrified with horror and mortification for a few seconds, but she soon rallied sufficiently to say that she was not sure that she had understood her ladyship, for she did not speak Scotch; nor indeed, for that matter, did any servant in the house; but she was sure, from the orders she had received from her own lady, that Lady Madelaine Tilden had never entertained an idea that her ladyship would demean herself by meddling with the housekeeping.

This perfectly respectful, but stinging rejoinder, told in two ways, and I saw a burning spot of red mount to the brow of Lady Flora, while her lips turned blue with suppressed rage. She struggled resolutely against it, however; and contented herself by remarking that she expected obedience, and not argument.

“ But, Miss Tilden — Miss Eveleen ” — commenced the excited guardian of the keys.

I merely waved my hand to silence all reference to myself. My disgust was too great for me to venture any attempt at utterance.

“ But, pray, my dear young lady, for my sake, for all our sakes, do remember that when my honoured lady is absent, you are the mistress of the house—” persisted Mrs. Locksley.

I was still silent ; but not so the thrifty daughter of Glenfillan. In words infinitely more energetic than eloquent, the dismayed and deposed functionary was ordered to leave the room on the instant ; and she obeyed with most undignified alacrity, evidently more from bewilderment of mind than from any intention of acquiescence to the will of her new tyrant. Throughout the whole scene I had suffered bitterly. Wounded pride, suppressed indignation, and withering contempt, had, each in turn, swelled my heart almost to bursting. I felt that Rooksley and its inhabitants would become the fable of the neighbourhood. The world, ever ready to seize the malicious side of every question, would reluctantly admit the possibility that any guest, however closely connected with the mistress of the house, could permit herself to interfere with its domestic economy. It would, therefore, be believed that all the steps so authoritatively and un-

ceremoniously taken by the new inmate, had been suggested by my mother herself; and the haughty Lady Madelaine, who had borne herself so proudly towards the first families in the county, would be mixed up in legends of famished housekeepers, and exasperated underlings. I was, in short, so thoroughly excited by Lady Flora's presumption, exhibited as it was, moreover, with the coarsest vulgarity, that, as I chanced to glance towards the unmoved and immoveable Adela, who, flung back in an arm-chair, was calmly amusing herself with a volume of Florian's Pastorals, I could have torn the book from her hand, and hurled it to the other extremity of the apartment.

My reader may possibly feel some surprise that, suffering so acutely as I did from what was passing before my eyes, I did not retire to my own room, and shut out so painful a spectacle. It would have been contrary to my nature to have made so undeniable a demonstration of cowardice. There was something in the self-gratulatory and magnificent deportment of the lady who now ruled Rooksley, which convinced me that the despicable drama was not yet played out; and I resolved to remain, in order to ascertain how far the disgrace of my parents was to extend. I remarked that the keen gray eye of Lady Flora had been several times turned earnestly towards me since the exit of Mrs. Locksley, and I

felt convinced that she was anxious to see it succeeded by my own. Brave matters as she might, she could not conceal that I was *de trop* ; and I was glad of it. I accordingly seated myself more commodiously in my chair, and took up a daily paper which was lying on the table beside me. She saw at once that there was no hope of my disappearance ; and lost not a moment in asserting her supposed power over myself in consequence.

“ Ring the bell, Eve-leen,” she said abruptly.

I neither moved, nor looked up.

“ Do ye no’ hear me, Miss Tilden ?”

“ Yes, madam,” I answered in a calm voice, as I deposited the paper once more upon the table, and looked her demurely and steadily in the face.

“ Then, why did ye no’ ring the bell when I desired ye ?”

“ Because I only obey the orders of those who have a right to give them. Had you made a request, madam, I might possibly have complied with it.”

“ The Lord be gude unto me !” exclaimed the irate lady ! “ things are come to a pretty pass indeed when a set-up miss will no’ obey her own aunt !”

“ You are not my aunt, Lady Flora Glenfillan ;” I replied haughtily ; “ I have already, upon a former occasion, explicitly made this known to you.

None of the blood of the Macspleuchans runs in *my* veins."

"And ye obstinately refuse to do as I desire ye? Ye will no' ring the bell?"

"I absolutely refuse—I will *not*."

Lady Flora groaned aloud; and then, abruptly reverting to my slighting remark on her family, she said, with a sneer which appeared to be the most natural expression of her countenance, so instantly and easily did it settle itself upon her shrewish features; "Ye'll be telling us soon, I suppose, Miss Eve-leen Tilden, that the young lady opposite is no' your sister."

"I never amuse myself by useless fallacies, and far less by direct untruths, madam; and I am well aware that, by the accident of birth, Adela and myself bear the relationship you mention. I am aware that we are the children of the same parents, and consequently, as I have just remarked—by birth at least—sisters."

I had emphasized my reply as markedly as I could; and I detected a quick glance and a nervous movement in Adela, which, for an instant, led me to hope that I had provoked a rejoinder; but I deceived myself. In the next moment she sat calm and still, with her eyes once more riveted on the Pastorals.

"Hech, sirs! here's wonderfu' condescension,"

ejaculated the worsted enemy, grasping the leathern arms of her chair and lifting herself half out of it, only to regain her seat with a sudden jerk mightily unpoetical in sound. "An Earl's daughter is no' grand enough for the upstart queans o' the present day; and me looked up to at my own place as a leader! It's wise-like that, o' my conscience."

Then, after a momentary silence which I had felt no inclination to break, she exclaimed with a startling vehemence which made me spring in my chair—

"Ring the bell, Adela."

"Yes—aunt," said the young lady thus gently apostrophized; and having complied with the command, she demurely resumed her seat.

A servant instantly appeared.

"I wish to speak with Mr. Bottlemore—instantly," said the prima-donna.

The man bowed, and withdrew; but not before I had detected a roguish smile playing about his lips.

The precise and polite butler made his appearance within five minutes, during which time no word had been spoken in the breakfast-room.

Lady Flora leaned forward in her chair, and returned his punctilious salutation with an elongatory motion of her chin. She evidently felt herself at that moment in a very responsible and dignified

position. Not another moment was lost. In the same masterly style in which she had discussed with poor, discomfited Mrs. Locksley, the peculiarly agreeable and well-chosen subject of cookery,

“ ————— all the way
From soup to *fondue* and *soufflé*.”

Although, to quote once more the same witty poet, the busy lady could

“ ————— scarcely tell
A *Salmi* from a *Bechamelle*,”

and bewildered my mother's good and clever house-keeper quite as much in her turn, by talking of “bannocks,” and “griddlecakes,” and other delicacies of her highland table, not omitting the popular “stirabout,” which she had been pre-eminently anxious to introduce into the Rooksley kitchen—even after the same fashion did she proceed to question, and to direct staid Mr. Bottlemore, my father's especial favourite.

“Nothing but port and sherry at the upper table, did I understand your ladyship to say?” asked the demure voice; “even in the event of guests.”

“Do I no' speak plain, sir?” was the counter-question.

“Most assuredly, my lady; your ladyship's voice is very distinctly audible; a trifle of difficulty

there may be, perhaps, in the expression of your ladyship's meaning occasionally ; but with patience and attention on my part, that may, without doubt, be overcome."

Lady Flora looked delightfully mystified. With all his polite placidity of countenance and demeanour, she evidently had a suspicion that Mr. Bottlemore was laughing at her. As for me, I could have knighted him on the spot, had I been a sovereign, and worn a sword. Under my actual circumstances, I was obliged to content myself by sitting silent, and playing with the poker.

Let her impression have been what it might, however, before she next spoke, the Great Agitator had made up her mind to pacific measures for the moment ; and when the sly old man inquired, with a profound inclination, whether her ladyship had any further orders for him before he withdrew, she put the finishing stroke to her financial arrangements by strictly forbidding all wine, of whatever description, at the housekeeper's table.

Bottlemore smiled quietly, as he remarked that perhaps her ladyship was not aware that, in all large establishments, this privilege was a matter of course at the tables of the upper servants.

"Then the sooner ye're all unprivileged the better ;" angrily exclaimed my mother's representative ; "a pack o' lazy loons that are na'worth your

saut ! Set ye up, forsooth, with wine ! It shan't be done, I say, while I am mistress here. Gude save us a' ! wine, indeed ! Why, my sister maun be distraught. Ye have my last word, Mr. Butler —no more wine shall ye have, to sit guzzling o'er below there, instead o' minding to do your business."

" I fear, my lady, that I must disobey your ladyship's commands on this subject ;" said the placid individual she addressed ; "and not only disobey them myself, but also assist Mrs. Locksley and the ladies' maids to do the same. The wine, my lady, is in our agreements."

Again the dark, red spot rose to the forehead of Lady Flora ; Bottlemore's last assertion was not to be overruled ; yet still, with an obstinacy which spoke volumes for her nerve, she determined not to be entirely baffled ; and, accordingly, assuming an air of majestic authority, which, the subject considered, made her look at the moment exceedingly like the superannuated Siddons of a barn-tragedy, she thundered out, in a voice which would have made itself audible amid the very "fury of the elements :"

" Then, sir, ye maun drink Cape !"

Poor Bottlemore ! I think I see him once more before me. He, whose fastidious master declared him to be the best judge of wine with whom he had

ever come into contact — never shall I forget his look of blank amazement. He was several minutes before he recovered the shock ; but he had no sooner done so than, in an accent of indignation which almost revenged the injured dignity of Rooksley, he exclaimed boldly :—

“ I am proud to say, madam, that the cellars of Mr. Tilden, since I have had control over them, have never been disgraced by the filthy compound it has pleased your ladyship to mention. Mr. Tilden, madam, drinks wine, not drugs ; and so do all who have the honour to belong to him. I regret to seem wanting in respect to your ladyship ; but this I solemnly declare, that I will neither be art nor part in the purchase of any such poison, nor will I be held responsible for any such proceeding.”

“ Hout, tout, man, gie us nane o’ your din !” vehemently broke in Lady Flora ; “ I’m just deafened wi’ it. Can I no’ buy the wine mysel ?”

“ Certainly, madam, if your ladyship also purposes to drink it after it is bought ;” said the butler sturdily ; “ but this much, my lady, I most respectfully inform you, that not a single cork shall be drawn in Mrs. Locksley’s room ; nor shall a drop be forced down the throat of my dear young lady here.” Then, approaching me with the greatest deference, he asked, in a low and well-bred

tone—"What description of wine shall I supply for your use, madam, under the new regulation of the family?"

"I leave it entirely to yourself, my good Bottle-more;" I said smilingly; only, pray do not allow me to be poisoned. I am too young to be envious of such a fate."

He bowed, and at once left the room, without any further impediment from his tormentor; and when I had allowed him sufficient time to traverse the gallery, I rose from my chair, and pausing for a moment before the chagrined and disappointed author of my present mortification, I said slowly and coldly; "I have borne all the hideous scene of this morning, madam, in silence; but I can bear no more; and I now leave you to the pleasant triumph which you must necessarily feel after your well-bred contention with my father's menials. I have but one remark to make, one piece of advice to offer to you, and I do it emphatically. Suffer the disgrace which you have this day wilfully brought upon your sister to suffice; believe me, it is already more than sufficient; and do not venture, for your own sake, to drive to the county-town with the Tilden liveries, to make purchases which will render *my* family the common laughing-stock of the neighbourhood. You do not understand my

father, or you would not have dared the impertinences of this morning."

I had no opportunity of ascertaining the effect of my words ; for, when I ceased to utter them, I left the room ; and, shutting myself into my own chamber, gave free vent to the bitter feelings which I had so long suppressed.

CHAPTER IV.

On the following morning, immediately that I had left the breakfast-room, and was awaiting in the saloon—the wretched-looking, desolate apartment which, during my mother's residence at Rooksley, had always been a scene of light and movement—the arrival of one of my masters, I was in my turn honoured with a deputation from the servants' hall. I sickened as I saw them enter, but there was no remedy; and, accordingly, when I beheld Mrs. Locksley and Mr. Bottlemore respectfully approach me, while the remainder of the party paused deferentially just within the door, which they closed carefully after them, I threw myself into a seat, and abandoned myself to my fate.

I was not left long in suspense as to their purpose. Complaints, loud and long; expostulations, logical and earnest; and entreaties, anxious and emphatic, were poured out before me. “Her

Scotch ladyship" was declared to be more than they could bear up against; she had not left her room more than three or four hours before their peculiar territories were invaded, and their ears assailed by unsavoury epithets, which to them appeared even more obnoxious from their not being able to understand half their meaning; and now their supplies were to be cut off, and the garrison to be starved out, unless it pleased "their young lady" to come to the rescue.

"Only imagine, Miss Tilden," sobbed out the housekeeper, when the general grievances had been laid before me; "only imagine, ma'am, the disgrace to *my* situation and *my* time of life, to be followed up and scolded at, like a common kitchen-maid! I couldn't live through it. I'm sure, it would break my heart. And then the bill of fare every day for *both* tables, Miss Eveleen!—we shall all be starved before the year's at an end. Sheep's heads, with the wool on, ma'am, and cakes made of oats. The coachman was the first to declare that he would leave if they were set before him; for he should be afraid his own horses would run over him out of pure spite, if he was guilty even of tasting them. And if such a prospect frightened Jones, Miss Eveleen, who is not a man to be easily daunted, only think of their being served up to you!"

“ But, if that were all,” broke in the modulated tones of the butler, “ it might be got over, madam, for it would be a mere case of ‘take it or leave it ;’ but the wine, Miss Eveleen, is a more serious matter. I have already declared my mind on the subject to her ladyship, who, it seems to me (if I may say so without disrespect to the family), doesn’t appear to understand clearly what she’s about, and has undertaken more than she can manage ; but I can’t endure to live in this state of open rebellion under the roof of so kind and honoured a master ; and therefore, madam—therefore, Miss Tilden”—and here he paused a moment in order to clear his throat, and render the utterance of what he still had to say less difficult ; “ therefore I have consented, in the name of all the establishment (including the out-door servants), to wait upon you for the purpose of entreating your interference ; or, in the event of your refusing it, to inform you of our intention to quit Mr. Tilden’s service, although we are all grateful for the past, and shall at all times be happy to acknowledge that we shall never find a better than it *was*.”

Here the phalanx of men and maids upon the threshold performed divers shamefaced and awkward salutations.

“ As for myself,” continued the spokesman, at the close of this pantomime ; “ I never thought to have

had to look for another home. I hoped to live and die in the family. But to be told to lay in a stock of Cape wine at the chief town of the very county for which my master sits in parliament, and where he has always spent his money like a prince, as indeed he is in his heart, it's more than I *can* do ! To go and disgrace both him and myself before a parcel of backbiting people, that have always looked up to us !—it can't be done with any consistency ; and so, my dear young lady, as I said before, I'd rather go than be guilty of it."

Here the worthy man brushed his handkerchief across his eyes, and shook his head so portentously that he made the powder fly in all directions.

" My complaint is altogether the same, ma'am ;" said the lachrymose housekeeper, as she thrust her hand into her capacious pocket in search of a similar piece of drapery.

" Indeed ! my trusty Locksley," I said with a smile ; " and were *you* also commanded to drive to the county town for a stock of Cape ?"

" No, ma'am—no, Miss Eveleen ;" was the plaintive reply, as the tears rolled down her smooth and comely cheeks ; " Mine was even worse, far worse—sheep's heads, with the wool on, twice a week. It would ruin us all in the village ; and, like Mr. Bottlemore, I'd rather go."

“ My good people,” I said, as I rose from the sofa, divided between amusement and annoyance, “ you must all be well aware that I am still too young for the exercise of such an act of authority as that of changing the whole establishment of my father’s house. You know also, that I am now daily expecting his arrival ; and I am quite sure that your wrongs will only require to be known to him, to be at once redressed. Is not this reasonable ?”

An affirmative salutation was the reply.

“ So far well ;” I continued ; “ but to thus much I pledge myself, that should his visit be by any chance delayed, I will myself write and inform him of all the circumstances of the case.”

A murmur of approbation greeted the promise.

“ This is not the first time, you are aware, Mrs. Locksley,” I pursued, “ that I have been informed of similar intentions, although never before of a general intention of leaving Rooksley, on the part of some of your subordinates ; and the plea was, on those occasions, if I remember rightly, the dull monotony and perpetual quiet of the place, under a mistress of fifteen, who had not the power to give it greater animation. Do not believe that I am insensible to your present annoyance, when I remind you of a fable with which you must be familiar ; and in which, tired of the ease and liberty of a

commonwealth, the frogs petitioned Jupiter for a king, who in pity of their ignorance cast a log of wood into the lake, and bade them receive their sovereign. For a time the sight of this huge mass floating upon the surface of the water sufficed to amuse them—they had the semblance of a monarch, and were content ; but, ere long, as they experienced no interference from his placid majesty, and that his possession had left them in precisely the same condition of ease and freedom as formerly, they complained that Jove had jested with them, and renewed their supplications. This time they had their wish—King Stork appeared upon the borders of the lake, and so assiduously devoured such of his living subjects as chanced to fall into his way, that the diminished remainder were afraid to put their noses above water ; and such as did contrive to escape during the brief intervals when his majesty had overgorged himself, hastened to emigrate to another sheet of water, where they might regain the quiet they had lost.”

At this moment some one knocked at the door, and a groom extended to the footman by whom it was opened a letter which had just arrived for me, and which was superscribed “ Immediate.”

I lost not a moment in breaking the seal, and the servants had not yet quitted the room, when, with a piercing scream, I fell senseless to the floor.

When I recovered consciousness I found myself lying upon a sofa, and tended by the housekeeper and Joséphine. My first movement was to motion them to close the blinds—I could not bear the light; and then I again sank back in an agony of grief, and buried my face among the cushions.

“*Pour l’amour de la Sainte Vierge!* Mademoiselle, tell us what is the matter?” exclaimed the kneeling Joséphine.

“For pity’s sake let us know the worst!” entreated Mrs. Locksley.

“Read!” I exclaimed, suddenly raising my head, and pointing to the fatal letter, which still remained where it had fallen from my hand, “read, and aloud, that my heart may break at once!” I was obeyed. It was written by my father’s body-servant, and its contents were these:—

“Grosvenor Square, Thursday.

“Madam,

“By desire of her ladyship, I write to inform you of the dreadful calamity which has taken place in the family, and I have instructions to request that you will immediately communicate the mournful tidings to Miss Adela Tilden and the Lady Flora Glenfillan. We are all in a state of the greatest grief, and seem to feel more every

hour the value of him that we have lost. My honoured master is no more. After speaking for upwards of an hour in the House, which was very close and crowded, Mr. Tilden, in order to refresh himself after his exertion, dismissed the carriage, and determined to walk home. He took cold; but, as the question in which he felt so much interest was still before the House, he could not be prevailed upon to absent himself; and so, from bad he rapidly became worse, and died on the fifth day (yesterday) of pleurisy. The deceased is to be interred in ten days after that of his demise; and I am sure it will be a great consolation to you, madam, to know that the Premier, and nearly all his Majesty's ministers, will attend the funeral; and as regards the nobility, we have already sixty carriages upon our list. This, madam, as you may believe, is very comforting to her ladyship, who is as well as can be expected, but has neither time nor spirits to write herself as yet. My lady instructs me to say, that directly the last honours are paid to my poor master she shall set off post for Rooksley, where she desires that Mrs. Locksley will have Mr. Tilden's private sitting-room hung with black before Sunday next; it is to be done precisely after the plan of which I have the honour to enclose a sketch, and which was approved by

her ladyship for the principal drawing-room in Grosvenor Square. I have no further instructions, and therefore subscribe myself,

“ Madam,

“ Your most obedient humble servant,

“ JOHN DALE.”

And this was all ! My father, my fond but ill-requited father was dead—was in a few brief days to be carried to his grave—and I knew no more ! I cannot describe the agony of my grief, the anguish of my remorse. Every detail of the past rose up before me ; and the hopes which I had almost unconsciously formed for the future, and in which the figure of my father had been ever prominent, mingled with the bitterness of my soul. I ceased to weep. A deeper and sterner feeling took possession of me. I should be henceforth alone. My mother had ceased to love me—my sister had never done so ; even my last-acquired friend—even Lady O’Halloran herself—although delegated by that very father whom I had now lost to cherish and protect me, and who had taught me to love and to cling to him as I had never before done—she had already given symptoms of preferring a stranger to myself. I was bewildered by the extent of my misfortune. I thought with contemptuous pity of the poor and futile distinctions to the dead, which had already

helped to afford consolation to Lady Madelaine—to his widow—whom he had surrounded with opulence and honour ; and then I remembered, as if in contrast to these, the fresh flowers with which I had each morning, since his expected arrival, fondly decorated his room, in order that he might breathe their welcome upon his very entrance—a welcome which he was never more to experience beneath his own roof.

Profound and heartfelt grief lingers willingly over details like these ; they are the stones which the spirit piles upon the cairns of the departed. For all other sorrows there is consolation—in all other trials there is hope ; but on this earth there is none for death. It comes boldly, suddenly before us, and defies all remedy. I had heard more, I had spoken more, and, above all, I had thought more, of my father during the last few months than I had ever before done. I had striven to bring his image before me incessantly. I had treasured up every evidence of his taste, every shade of his character, in order to form my own after that model. I had made his favourite apartment my refuge, when vexation and annoyance had wounded my spirit ; I had accustomed myself in its genial solitude to review the folly, the coldness of my ungrateful girlhood to the only being who really loved me for myself ; and there had I shed

those regretful but soothing tears which, summoned by sorrow for the past, inspire better resolutions for the future. And all had been too late ! I had sought strength only of myself ; I had never learned that without higher and holier assistance I was powerless, nor did I feel it even now. My sole sensation was one of grief and wrong. Others, many others, were beloved by scores of tender relatives and friends ; I had but one, and even he was taken from me—taken, too, just at the moment when I was prepared to pour out before him the long-hoarded treasure of my filial affection ; I had no consolation—none !

Let no one imagine this description of my first grief to be exaggerated. Let them rather search into human nature, and admit its truth. As I now look back, I cannot contemplate it with the same complacency as I did even in the earlier period of my sorrowing. I had learned to love my father with a fervour which bordered on romance—to feel proud alike of his talents and of his virtues—to experience gratitude for the neglected tenderness which he had lavished on me in my childhood, and to form hearty resolutions of returning it tenfold in the time to come. But, alas ! I now see what I did not then even suspect. All the tears which I so passionately shed did not embalm the memory of my father. Many, too

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The feelings of Adela were more extraordinary and inexplicable. There were moments when her depression was so great, that she could not endure any companionship ; and would rush abruptly from the presence of every one, and shut herself into her room for hours. On her re-appearance, there was no mistaking the agony in which the interval had been passed : her eyes were swollen with weeping, and her cheeks pale and sunken ; and yet, at times, she rallied so wonderfully as to display more bodily and mental energy than I had ever before believed her to possess. She produced upon me the effect of a person who had suddenly flung off a heavy weight, and who experienced some great and hidden relief.

The first occasion upon which we had ever spoken together with the confidence and affection of relatives—I dare not say of sisters—was on the evening of the day when the fatal news reached us. I had desired that no one should disturb me ; and hour after hour had passed, as I lay silent and almost motionless upon my sofa, sunk in those sad and bitter thoughts which I have endeavoured to describe. The sun had set unheeded ; the twilight had faded into darkness ; and to me there had seemed no change. I was absorbed in my own anguish, when I distinctly heard a light stroke upon the door, but I was too listless in my misery to

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other a small lamp, w
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I was lying, and sat
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" Poor Evaleen ! "
musical voice, which

duties delegated to us which we must perform. Our father's room—"

"He will never, never occupy it more!" I exclaimed in a fresh paroxysm of grief—"Adela, Adela, we have lost our best friend!"

"I know it—I feel it;" replied my sister, in the same low and firm tone as she had hitherto spoken; "perhaps our only one. But it is not in order to aggravate your regrets that I am here. You have the key that is needed, Eveleen; there was no means of ingress without an application to yourself. There are strangers in the house, who—who"—she struggled with her emotion, as a convulsive shudder made me tremble in every limb; and then added hastily, as though she feared that she could not much longer restrain her tears—"and Lady Flora is already with them, and will superintend everything, if you will send her the key."

"I thank you, Adela;" I said, with a sudden calmness for which I could not account even to myself; "there are, indeed, duties delegated to us. You know how carefully, how reverently I have hitherto guarded that, to me, sacred spot from the pollution of a stranger's curiosity. I will do so still. You have, indeed, performed a sister's part towards me to-night—complete it now. Withdraw Lady Flora from the gallery; her services are not needed, nor can they be either accepted or per-

mitted. I would rather not meet her yet—nor *there*.”

Adela looked steadily at me for a moment, and then, taking up her lamp, left the room. I required a few moments to compose myself, and to prepare for the dismal and trying duty which I had refused to transfer to another ; and ere I had well succeeded, Joséphine appeared with a light, which she placed upon a console near the door, and instantly withdrew. I walked slowly towards it, lifted it, and stood quietly until I found that I could carry it with a steady clasp ; and then, having steeped my hands and face in Hungary water, I passed out into the gallery.

A confused murmur of hoarse whisperings fell on my ear as I advanced, and I soon stood opposite the impatient group who were to drape the apartment of my father in its lugubrious trappings. As I stopped before them, all the servants whom curiosity or interest had attracted to the spot silently retired, save the butler ; who, drowned in tears, had not yet perceived my arrival.

“Bottlemore,” I said firmly ; “where is the enclosure of Lady Madelaine’s letter?”

He tendered it silently, and without raising his eyes.

“Here, gentlemen, is the task which you have to perform. Can it be accomplished to-night?”

“I fear it’s impossible, miss ;” said he who appeared to be the leader, and who was exhausting himself in reverences, each lower than the last, amid bales and packages all rolled in black wrappers, and looking like a group of coffins waiting for interment, as they lay huddled together in the dusky light ; “unless, indeed, we worked till morning ; but then, nightwork is double pay.”

“Let it be done ;” said I, as I drew out the key and opened the door ; “such a scene would be difficult to bear twice.”

My foot was already on the threshold, when I suddenly started back with a slight scream, and clung to Bottlemore, who was following closely behind me.

“Madam, dear Miss Eveleen, what have you seen ?” inquired the faithful old man, as he strove to look over my shoulder, while the sable-clad functionaries in his rear endeavoured in vain to discover the cause of my panic, for the second battant of the door was still unopened, and the butler and myself had filled the vacant space.

In an instant I recovered myself. I was ashamed of my folly, although I still trembled from its effects. As I before stated, I had taken no heed of time, and was not aware that it had progressed so rapidly. The moon, then at its full, was pouring a flood of light over the room ; and as

the door gave way under my hand, a stream of cold air swept like an icy breath across my face, while the draperies of the curtains flapped heavily, with a dull and smothered sound. In my excited state of mind, it was not wonderful that I was startled; but my surprise was still further increased, when, on entering the room, and advancing towards the marble table which occupied the centre of the floor, I saw the magnificent exotic flowers which I had collected from the conservatories only that morning lying scattered and withering beside the overturned vase which had contained them. As I was about to utter an exclamation, something suddenly rose from the floor beside me, and with a rushing noise made for the moonlighted window, and beat itself heavily against the glass. All was instantly explained. It was a wood-pigeon, which, probably pursued by a hawk, had found an entrance, by some means, into the apartment. But how? That enigma also was soon solved, by one of the workmen discovering a broken pane of glass in the centre window.

All these trifling facts, simple as they seemed, nevertheless perplexed me greatly. That no accident of the sort had taken place until long past noon, I was well aware; for, after having completed my floral offering to my father, I had remained for several hours reading and musing in his

apartment. I felt that, weak as it seemed, my nerves were now too much shaken to admit of my following up the trying duty which I had been about to perform ; and when I saw the cold and business-like proceedings of the callous men about me, and beheld the floor and furniture heaped with sable masses which appeared to my excited senses to have a death-scent hanging about them, I could contend no longer ; but hurriedly desiring Bottlemore to take the whole direction upon himself ; not to suffer a soul save my sister Adela, no matter whom, to enter except the workmen ; and to bring me the key, which I would await in my dressing-room, the instant they had departed, I hurriedly retired. I felt the necessity of once more being alone ; and, as I closed the door of my chamber behind me, I again flung myself into a seat, to mourn in bitterness, and, if possible, to weep.

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The workmen emment were so little fa that I distinctly h hammer, and the so scarcely regretted tha that degree of wretc relief in every accessi only fitting and consis of its head all should b quiet to which its inn tomed should be dispe and affection in whic enfolded the future. judge of the progress

strangers ; and thus I sat, hour after hour, nursing my sad and bitter thoughts : now weeping over my sudden and irreparable loss, now asking myself what would be my future fate under the guidance and authority of such a mother as Lady Madelaine.

Daylight came creeping, dull and cheerless, through the windows of my room ; in the confusion consequent upon the fatal event which had occurred, the curtains had been left undrawn ; and, as I had refused all attendance, the omission had escaped notice. I saw, therefore, for the first time, the dreary contest between light and darkness which ever precedes a new day. I involuntarily rose and looked out, for the scene was consonant to my then state of feeling. Poets have sung brightly of the birth of day, and they are well borne out by the glories of a rising sun ; but, before the roseate and golden splendour of this fair vision can be enjoyed, the watcher must first undergo the saddening and dreary spectacle of the morning twilight ; and it was upon this that I stood and gazed at that melancholy moment. As the light broke, a cold shiver crept over my frame, and I drew my shawl more closely about me ; everything upon which I looked partook of the same chilling character ; a mass of wreathing mists overhung the surface of the lake, and dispersed slowly and sullenly, as if reluctant to disclose its limpid beauties. The

dew hung heavily upon the trees, and at intervals fell in large drops to the earth, like tears wrung from a suffering spirit. The flowers were still closed ; the sky was louring and leaden ; and even the wind, as it swept by, moaned as though it bewailed the comfortless aspect of the objects by which it was surrounded. The light, in cold and quivering streaks, looking in their dull setting like lances of polished steel, by slow degrees pierced through the dark vapours ; and, lengthening and broadening into warmer beauty, eventually took a glow and a glory which foretold the coming of the mighty orb that was about to flood the earth with warmth and radiance.

I instinctively closed my eyes. My sympathies were no longer with the scene before me. The sun was again rising to gladden the earth—my hope was still buried. There was no longer any thing in common between us ; and I was in the act of letting fall the heavy curtains, in order once more to shroud myself in darkness, when I heard the sound of footsteps approaching my room, and immediately afterwards a cautious stroke upon the door. As I replied to the signal for admission, Bottlemore opened it quietly, and moved towards me.

“ Is all completed ? ” I asked.

“ Not yet, madam ; ” he replied in a suppressed

voice: "though every thing is in active progress, and exactly according to the instructions; but this, my dear young lady, is not my errand. I have thought it my duty —" Here he paused—looked embarrassed, and then glanced from me to a small parcel which he held in his hand.

"Whatever it may be, if you feel that your duty requires it of you, do it fearlessly;" I said, totally indifferent to every subject save that by which I was absorbed.

"I have discovered the cause of the broken window;" resumed the butler, still evidently ill at ease; "I have brought it to you, madam; it is indeed addressed to you."

"To me!" I exclaimed, as I extended my hand tremblingly to receive it. "What can this mean, Bottlemore?"

The man shook his head. He had probably asked himself the same question more than once since the mysterious missile came into his possession.

The parcel, although small, was heavy; and as I eagerly carried it to the window, where the light had become sufficiently strong to enable me easily to trace the superscription, I found that it was, as he had said, directed to myself. I became much agitated; and as I tore it open, the curtain which I had hitherto held back with my hand fell behind

come? I had never
communication, save
fevered from anxiety
as I stood. I was glad
no one was by to see
and glanced at the
Devereux. It was with
an exclamation. Realizing
I was conscious of the
zealous servant who
felt that I could not
for composure, and ex-
cess.

" 'Tis a poor jest
striving to force a
giving into his hand
which it was enclosed
have come, let it not
and thoughts, which

“and at such a moment, too! But you say rightly, my dear young lady; we have now no time for fooleries like these. Before long, perhaps—” and he paused as I had done, made a low bow, and retired. If he felt any suspicion that he had been mystified, he at least looked none.

And now I was again alone. The blood was burning over brow and bosom. I remained motionless—undetermined—with my gaze fastened upon the curtain behind which lay the letter that I had flung down when I emerged to dismiss Bottlemore. For the moment I had forgotten all—my dead father—the approaching arrival of my mother—the clouds which had gathered around my future destiny. I remembered nothing save myself and Devereux—the Devereux whom I had loved, and by whom I had been beloved in my turn. He was here then—breathing the same air—looking upon the same light. *Here!*—but at what a moment! Deep shame came upon me. The remembrance of my loss—a loss yet known to me only a few hours—made me recoil with disgust from my own selfishness; but the feeling did not last long—it could not. The very memory that I had no longer a father—that I should hereafter be the tool, and perhaps the victim, of the unloving rule of an estranged and careless mother—that I was, morally at least, an orphan—and that, without other sup-

port, I was helpless, soon reconciled me with myself. Moreover, there was a tinge of romance in the whole affair, which doubtlessly, although I was at the moment unconscious of its influence, served not a little to silence my self-accusations.

The time went by so rapidly during this mental conflict, that, before I had decided on reading the letter, and ascertaining its purpose, Bottlemore was once more at my door to intimate that the funereal furniture of my father's apartment was completed; and to urge me respectfully to visit it in his presence, in order that he might, after obtaining my sanction, dismiss the workmen. I extended my hand for the key, but declined the invitation. "Dismiss them on your own responsibility;" I said; "I know that I can trust you. I dare not trust myself *yet*. I have undergone much, too much within the last few hours. I need rest before I can venture upon such a visit."

"But will you really take the rest that you require, my dear young lady?" asked the worthy old man. "You are indeed beaten down by your grief; and no wonder, Miss Eveleen, no wonder! Ah, we shall all soon better understand what we have lost. We never made enough of him when he was here, but we shall have time enough to mourn him—time enough and cause enough, from the highest to the lowest."

Subdued as I previously was by conflicting emotions, this generous and impulsive burst of sorrow completely overcame me. It unlocked my tears, and once again I found relief.

“Leave me, my worthy friend ;” I sobbed with difficulty ; and, all my haughtiness levelled for the moment by this common demonstration of a common grief, I extended my hand to the faithful favourite of my father, who pressed his lips reverentially upon it, and then silently disappeared.

No ! I had said rightly ; I could not accompany him to the death-chamber—I dared not. It would have seemed to me like sacrilege to have intruded there when I had so recently loosened my grasp of Devereux’s letter, with feelings all-absorbed in its receipt. No—this I could not do. There was a short interval of tumult in the gallery. The strangers were departing. I then heard the crushing sound of wheels upon the gravel ; this soon died away also, and then all was silence both without and within the house. I flung open a window—it was not that beneath which the letter lay—and the sweet, soft air of the early morning came upon me like incense. All upon which I looked was glowing with freshness and beauty. The lake-ripple danced with its silver feet joyously in the sunshine, to the music of the fresh breeze that bore it company ; the flowers had all opened their cups,

and the bees and butterflies were sipping their morning-draughts from the jewelled chalices ; while the birds, Heaven's own chosen choir, were singing their matins in notes which seemed to invite all nature to join in their hallelujahs. A change had come over the whole earth, yet I shrank from it no longer. I was still in tears—still sorrowing—but a sun had risen in my heart, which had wrought its own change also.

And still the letter lay where I had cast it down.

I do not remember the course of my thoughts during the hours that I sat, silent and motionless, beside that open window. I believe that at intervals I could not strictly be said to think at all. My brain whirled from over-exertion, and induced that physical apathy which makes us shrink from further efforts ; and in this way, also, do I account for the length of time which I suffered to elapse before I determined on the perusal of Devereux's letter. I knew that it lay near me ; that I could possess myself of it in an instant ; and I was satisfied with this conviction. He had not forgotten me ; that was enough for the present moment. Like the crater of a volcano, which trembles for a time after the violence of the explosion is past, so did I suffer from the shock of the blow I had experienced, and helplessly yield myself up to its latent effects. Yet, despite the intensity of my first anguish, a feeling

of calm had stolen over me, which had soothed me into quietude ; and, for awhile, this alone was almost happiness. There was no jarring influence either within or about me. I was dreaming a waking dream, in which occasionally I was so mentally annihilated that I was unconscious even of my own existence.

But this state of things could not last for ever. The new day brings its claims and its duties to all classes of society. I was recalled to myself by passing footsteps and answering voices. With some difficulty I overcame my reluctance to terminate my solitude, and to return, as it appeared at the moment, into life ; but I knew that I had no alternative ; so, gathering up the long-neglected letter, I locked it away carefully in my desk, without hazarding one glance at its contents, and rang for Joséphine.

CHAPTER VI.

It was not until I began to exert myself, and had gone through the weariness of another toilette, that I discovered the extent of my fatigue. As I glanced into the dressing-glass, I scarcely knew myself; my eyes were dull and heavy, my cheeks and lips colourless, and my whole countenance swollen and disfigured. "And this is then the work of grief;" I murmured to myself; "this is all the opposition which youth and beauty can offer to the sorrows and trials of the world." My vanity was humbled by the conviction. I had never understood, until I became myself the proof, that a few hours could have wrought such havoc in early life.

I swallowed, with considerable effort, a few spoonfuls of chocolate; dismissed Joséphine as hastily as possible; and resolved at once to examine the letter of Devereux, which would, in all probability—thus did I argue as an apology to myself for

giving to it the precedence of nearer and higher duties—enable me to endure with more composure the trials of the day.

Hurriedly I drew it from its concealment. I felt like a guilty thing, and moved away from the window, as though to prevent the very sunshine from penetrating my secret. My breath came thick, my hands trembled, and the room and all the objects which it contained appeared to revolve about me. Nevertheless, I persisted ; and as I read I became less agitated. These were the contents of the letter :—

“ My own Eveleen !

“ Yes, so I will call you until your own lips forbid it—I address you in an awful and melancholy moment. I have just learnt your fatal loss. In another hour I shall have left town for Rooksley. Do not misjudge me for urging my own interests in the very midst of your first great sorrow : it is because I trust to mitigate your grief by my assurances of sympathy and tenderness that I feel urged to do so. I am aware that in losing your admirable father you have also lost your best and surest hope for the future. I know that the rule of your mother will be one of cold-heartedness and caprice. It is, therefore, at this hour that you need a friend. I shall trust to the fortune which

generally favours those who love, for the opportunity of seeing, or, at least, of hearing from you. I dread everything from the violence of your grief: but remember, you once assured me that you loved me; you received my vows in return; you are consequently mine—my own—and you must learn to be comforted for my sake. Hitherto, I have been passive, because I felt that time must do much for us, and I was anxious not to mar its beneficial effects by any premature imprudence; now, however, I hold myself bound by our common affection to be near you, even although I may not be enabled to see you beneath your paternal roof; for, cruel as this deprivation will necessarily prove to both of us, it is one to which I feel, my Eveleen, that we must be resigned. We are not yet at an age when we can emancipate ourselves from authority; but I have been too long an utter stranger to all your movements. Your name has been studiously avoided both by your mother and my own. There can be no doubt that, at the termination of her mourning, Lady Madelaine will introduce you into the world: you are young, beautiful, and attractive; and I tremble when I remember how little we yet know of each other; when I reflect upon the homage and adulation by which you will be immediately surrounded. It is true that I have already mixed with that same world, and that I have found

nothing there which could for a moment divert my heart from you ; but how can I be mad enough to hope that such would be *your* case ? Suffer me, then, I implore you, by any means which we can mutually adopt, to secure a deeper and a more tender interest in your affections. Let me be at once a brother and a lover.

——“ I am interrupted. Adieu—till I reach Rooksley. When I have ascertained how I can best communicate with you, I will add a postscript. Till then—good angels guard you !

“ HERBERT DEVEREUX.

“ PS. I am here, my own Eveleen ; here, at the little inn near the Park gate—how happy, I need not add, when I tell you that I have seen you. I could not have sought a fairer vision for my dreams ! I have seen you, Eveleen, standing near a window, arranging flowers in a porcelain vase, and thus have I discovered your apartment. So far, destiny has been propitious to me ! I have prowled like a poacher through the Rooksley woods since daylight. I am now about to make a cold, senseless stone my envied messenger. My only terror is lest I should alarm you by the rude method which I am compelled to adopt to insure the safe and secret receipt of my letter—lest I should scare you from your soft rest, and awaken you from some sleeping vision in which, perchance, my

image may have found a place. But, no ; your dreams, my poor Eveleen, your rest is too precious to me ; and both will be so soon and sadly clouded, that I will forbear until I feel convinced that you have left your chamber. I find that they are still ignorant in the village of the fatal event which has occurred, and consequently the tidings cannot yet have reached Rooksley. Sleep on then, my stricken love, sleep on in peace, while such slumber may still be yours. In a few hours you may welcome me as a comforter.

“ H. D.”

“ I do—I do—” I exclaimed mentally, as I pressed the paper to my lips and bosom ; “ generous, confiding Devereux ! you have, indeed, spoken peace, where all was wretchedness and dread.” I was for a moment steeped in happiness ; my tears were stayed, or, if they continued to fall, it was from a feeling which rendered me unconscious of the fact. A rainbow had burst through the storm-clouds by which I had been so lately enveloped. I might not see him ; but all my doubts, all my misgivings, were now over—Devereux still loved me ! Nor need the reader wonder at my temporary exaltation. I have already shown how fondly, yet how fearfully, I had long accustomed myself to dwell upon his image ; nor will any one, who knows

aught of human nature, doubt how much my boy-lover had gained by these retrospective reveries.

My first burst of gratified vanity and satisfied affection over, however, darkness once more gathered about my spirit. My sorrows were not removed, although they were mitigated, by this selfish joy. Alas! they admitted of no present remedy. I closed the letter slowly and sadly, for I felt that I could have dwelt upon it for hours; I replaced it in my desk, and was in the act of turning the key which was to conceal my treasure from all eyes save my own, when the door of my apartment softly opened, and Adela stood before me. I felt the blood leap to my brow. One instant sooner, and my secret might have been discovered! It was evident that she mistook the cause of my emotion: for, stopping abruptly in the centre of the floor, she said hastily, as a slight flush rose to her own cheek:

“Forgive me, Eveleen, not only that I have intruded upon you unsought, but also for the uncereemonious manner in which I entered. I forbore to make any noise, in the hope that you were endeavouring to obtain a little rest; and I ventured here to ascertain if it indeed were so, having learnt from Joséphine that you had watched all night.”

“I thank you, Adela;” I said in surprise, as I extended my hand; “I have sought sleep in vain.

The evil has come too suddenly—I had so much to regret—so much to repent.”

“ We have, indeed, learnt our dark lesson early ;” replied my sister, with a sigh ; “ should life continue to seem to me what both the present and the past have hitherto made it, regret and repentance must, I should think, be the inseparable companions to which we are all fated.”

“ Yet the world looks upon us both as objects of envy, Adela,” I said bitterly.

“ Upon us?—say, rather, upon yourself, Eveleen. Young, beautiful, rich, idolized—well might you inspire the feeling. But of me the world knows nothing, and recks less ; the banished daughter, the outcast alien, the discarded exile, the helpless girl, who for years—and those the years when all the purest affections are ready to gush forth on all around, and the awakening intellect takes note of every deprivation, both of heart and spirit, was banished and forgotten, or else, I say, that world of which you speak, would perchance have turned an eye less misjudging upon me.”

I was startled, almost affrighted, by the deep and concentrated passion with which this young girl, not yet fifteen years of age, gave utterance, in these burning words, to the indignation of her soul. In themselves they were calculated only to excite sympathy, and to awaken tenderness and pity ;

but the expression of her flashing eye, the withering bitterness of her quivering lip, the haughty defiance which appeared to dilate her whole form, were beyond all written description. Tullia must have worn such a look when she drove her chariot-wheels over the dead body of her father. My sister could never again be to me the silent and supine being to whom I had become accustomed, and whom I had despised in the haughty independence of my own nature. I felt awed by the excess of an emotion of which I had never believed her capable, and before which I involuntarily recoiled. I was at once conscious that in my hasty judgment of her character I had made a dangerous mistake. I now saw that she did not, like myself, fritter away her powers of mind and body, or betray the inward workings of her spirit, upon every petty provocation; but that she had already learned the secret of burying her thoughts too deeply to expose them to the scrutiny of every idle observer.

We were more estranged in heart from that moment than ever. I felt that my sister was an enemy to be feared; and a strange, shapeless, phantom-like conviction came suddenly upon me that she was destined to be MY enemy. Nevertheless, I approached her; I even extended my hand, but she affected not to perceive it.

“ I pray you, Adela, do not yield to feelings so

painful at such a moment as this," I said with difficulty.

"I thank you for the counsel ;" she replied coldly and placidly, already restored to perfect calm ; "the error was involuntary—I blush to have discovered so much weakness. The stricken deer should hide itself to weep, not call the hunters round it."

"Nay, speak less bitterly, Adela," I rejoined ; "you know not how grateful I should be for your confidence at another moment."

"I have no secrets to confide. I have just laid bare my whole history before you ; not that this communication was necessary, but simply that you might not again confuse my past career and your own, in your memory. Enough, however, of myself ; as you have just reminded me—this is not the moment."

"Do not believe that I intended to imply a rebuke by the remark."

"I had no such suspicion. It was right that you, who had just spent so many hours in one deep, unbroken chain of agonizing grief—in one long flood of ceaseless and inconsolable tears, without indulging in a single thought of self, should shrink with almost loathing from any less demonstrative exhibition of filial regret."

Adela had stabbed me to the quick. My head

sank upon my breast ; I was crushed. And she stood there before me, calm, and cold, and placid, as though no storm of passion had ever swept across her brow, and that she was an alien from all the frailties and weaknesses of humanity. After a moment's pause, my awakening pride lent me words.

“ You are mistaken, Adela ;” I said steadily ; “ mine was no such devoted vigil. That I wept and sorrowed for my dead father is indeed true ; wept, as the repentant and the bereaved alone *can* weep—wept, as perchance I never may again in this world. But there were many, many intervals when I sorrowed alone for myself—for you.”

“ The last was needless ;” interposed my listener with a bitter smile ; “ tears are not so strange to my eyelids that another should shed them for me ; nor am I, even young as I am, so unacquainted with sorrow as to be unable to bear my own burthen.”

“ Do you refuse my sympathy ?”

“ I do. It comes too late. I have mastered the lesson of self-dependence. I ask sympathy from no one.”

“ Yet, from an only sister—”

“ Rather say, only a sister—from a friend I might perchance be brought to endure it.”

“ Why should we not be friends ?”

“ Have you ever believed it possible? I could give you a hundred reasons to the contrary; but it were idle to do so when you can read them in your own heart—in your own struggles to affect the mere semblance of friendship for the forsaken daughter and the despised sister. Let us abjure such mockery, Eveleen. I am content to await your affection, until, like my prototype Cinderella, I have fitted on the slipper of high fortune. There is a moral in that little tale.”

I was sick at heart. Overwhelmed by this new and sudden development of my sister's character, my thoughts once more turned back to Devereux. He was the one star in my horizon of darkness. I felt that without his love and the consciousness of his proximity, I should have fallen into a state of apathy and despair. In my own home I had now nothing to hope. And was this to be the termination, this the climax of my brilliant girlhood? Again the image of Devereux rose upon my mental vision, and rebuked me for the thought. My sister had left the room as she ceased speaking, nor did I make one effort to detain her. I was glad to be for a time alone with my secret. At that moment I felt no inclination to confide to her the anxiety by which I was overwhelmed. Perhaps, had she evinced some evidence of sisterly sympathy and feeling, it might have been otherwise; for nothing so tho-

roughly opens the heart as sorrow ; but this was not to be, and we parted even more coldly than we had met.

Solitude, nevertheless, brought me little comfort, for reflection had become painful, and she had added to its bitterness. I wrung my hands in despair. Conscious as I was that I had already lived through a long life of emotion and mental experience, I was painfully aware that those about me still affected to consider me as a child, and I revolted at the injustice, I felt degraded by the position in which I was placed. The memory of Lady Madeleine could not have been so utterly blunted but that she must have thoroughly comprehended the nature and extent of the mortification to which the companionship of a Lady Flora Glenfillan must naturally subject me, as well as that of an estranged and unloving sister. In my father I might indeed have found encouragement and support ; and, in a few short days, he would be in his grave. Even in the persevering affection of Devereux there was bitterness ; for he did not dare to seek me openly, as an avowed and permitted suitor, but was condemned to prowl surreptitiously about the house which I inhabited, subject to constant surprise and perpetual insult from my mother's menials.

This last reflection brought with it another which touched me nearly. He was still mistaken as to

the identity of my apartment ; and might, by this error, be led into a second imprudence similar to that by which I had become possessed of his letter. And how was this danger to be avoided ? I could not condescend to make a confidant of one of my own attendants. I could not invite their suspicions or their sarcasms by avowing my acquaintance with his presence in the village ; nor did the whole course of my desultory reading furnish me with any other alternative. I knew not how to proceed.

I had so long accustomed myself to indulge my melancholy musings in the study of my father, that rather from instinct than reason, at this period of my reverie, I rose from my seat, and, drawing the key from my pocket, bent my way slowly thither, utterly thoughtless or regardless of the change which had been wrought in its appearance since I last left it. Great was indeed that change. The walls, the floors, the windows, all wore one solemn livery. There was a mockery of magnificence throughout the elaborate arrangement of the whole apartment. The garb and trappings of death had been distorted into vanity ; and my soul sickened as I entered, and closed the door behind me. The draperies of dull and heavy velvet, with their tasselled cords, shut out the beams of the mid-day sun, and left within a dim, ghastly twilight. The care of a kindly hand had indeed

replaced the vase of flowers which I had left overthrown and scattered, and it formed the only point of life in the solemn picture, for the books and mirrors were alike veiled from sight.

I felt as though I were an intruder ; and I threw myself down in agony upon a sofa draped with a deeply fringed pall, to weep afresh over my bereavement. After awhile I became oppressed by the weight of the atmosphere, and flung open one of the windows, even suffering the light and warmth from without to pass for a moment into the apartment. The effect of the change was cheering ; and I was about once more with regret to let fall the drapery, when my eye rested on the figure of a man stealthily emerging from the nearest shrubbery. My heart bounded as I watched him. He was tall and slight, and dressed in deep mourning. Suddenly he raised his head, and glanced hurriedly over the house. I could not be mistaken. It was Devereux !

In extreme agitation I withdrew from the window ; and, in another instant, I heard his step beneath it. The black curtains had evidently startled him into doubt, for during several seconds no result followed. He was apparently communing with himself. At the end of that period, however, a similar missive to that which he had first employed struck against the curtain, and then fell

heavily to the floor. Then, and then only, I ventured for one moment to the window, and looked down upon him. As he saw me, he stood for an instant motionless, and was about to speak, when, motioning him to silence, I pointed to the funereal draperies, and, shaking my head, indicated by my outstretched finger, as I leant for a brief minute from the casement, the window of my own apartment. That done, I drew back hurriedly ; and, letting fall the curtain, listened from behind it to his light and hasty steps as he departed ; and then, snatching up the new letter of which he had been the bearer, I hurried tremblingly to my own room.

CHAPTER VII.

The deed was done. I had now sanctioned his intrusion ; had permitted his clandestine correspondence ; and had virtually acknowledged his claim ; yet I felt no remorse. What, I mentally asked myself, could there be blameable in my case, in such a concession ? He alone remained on earth to love me. Was it not natural that I should cling to his affection ? I did not allow myself the hesitation of a moment. With eager hands I tore away the covering of the letter ; and, having pressed it to my lips, read it throughout with all the eagerness of strong emotion. It was replete with tenderness ; and my heart beat joyfully as I ascertained that, fearful of discovery for my sake, he had resolved never again to repeat the dangerous experiment of approaching the house, and had accordingly sought and discovered a place of concealment for his letters in the hollow trunk of a willow overhanging the lake, which he indicated with a care

that rendered mistake on my part impossible, and where he besought me to deposit my replies.

At a happier moment the romance of such an arrangement would have enchanted me ; and even in that hour of sorrow and perplexity, I derived consolation from the promise which it held out of a lengthened communion. I wiped away my tears, pressed back the hair that had fallen over my face, and resolved, assisted by this new and momentary energy, to brave the meeting with Lady Flora from which I had hitherto shrunk. I was evidently unexpected in the drawing-room. Adela was drowned in tears, and appeared to have resigned herself to a paroxysm of silent grief ; while Lady Flora sat behind her tapestry frame, on which a white handkerchief was ceremoniously displayed, deep in the mysteries of her laborious idleness.

My stay in the apartment was cold and brief. I listened, with all the patience I could command, to the maudling and lip-deep condolences which were poured forth before me ; but for the speculations which had grown out of the recent bereavement, I had no ear ; and I accordingly broke in upon them by a stately curtesy, and escaped from the room. I had not yet cast off my shawl, so, folding it closely round me, I passed through the conservatory, and soon found myself beside the willow of the lake. I sat down beneath its pendent

branches. I felt as though I had there found a new home and a new hope. All was bright and beautiful about me ; I was young. I believed myself to be beloved. I tried to remember that every sorrow, however deep and heartfelt, must have its term ; and to feel that I alone should not be excluded from this, the great and blessed privilege of time. No philosophy can be more welcome or more easy to a sanguine spirit than this—how then could I fail to be comforted by such a train of thought ? I did not. I was still sad, still remorseful, but I no longer despaired. I ceased to feel terror as the image of my mother rose up before me—the tears which I continued to give to the memory of my father lost their bitterness ; I no longer suffered myself to be troubled by visions of the hatred of Lady Flora and my sister ; in one word, I was reconciled *to myself* ; I was no longer an outcast and an alien from every heart.—Devereux had burst through the dark spell ; and—I was beloved !

When I rose to return to the house, I was a new being—my hope and energy were alike renewed. I hastened to replace the faded flowers in my father's apartment, and then closed the window which I had opened some hours previously. But I did not linger in the room ; its solemn gloom appalled me ; I wanted light and air. I wanted

action and physical exertion ; and the latter I could not find in the solitude of my own apartment. I had, consequently, only one miserable resource, and, *faute de mieux*, I sought it at the dinner-table, over which, with her white handkerchief still ostentatiously displayed, Lady Flora presided. The meal was gloomy enough ; the very servants moved mechanically about like automata, while an almost unbroken silence prevailed among ourselves.

The same cold and decent countenance was maintained throughout the whole period which elapsed until the day of the funeral. Had an unsuspected spectator seen us, as we sat hour after hour with our work or our books, we should have inevitably been cited as models of duty and propriety ; but what was the fact ? Lady Flora was rejoicing in her heart of hearts, as her needle passed slowly and monotonously through the eternal canvass upon which she was employed, at her unlooked-for emancipation from a dreaded thrall ; Adela preserved her usual mask of sullen self-command ; or, if she ever wept, she did so only when my eye was not upon her ; while I myself, who but a few days before had believed that my father's death was to me the seal of wretchedness which I must for ever bear upon my brow, even I found time, at stated intervals, to

visit the border of the lake, and to receive or reply to letters breathing only affection and hope. There existed, moreover, a feeling of repulsion among our party, as well understood by each of us as though we had put it frankly and boldly into words; and thus neither felt an inclination to dispel the silence, nor to lessen the estrangement.

On the funeral morning, this social monotony was painfully broken by the sight of the deep mourning garments in which we were mutually attired. The effect produced upon myself I shall never forget. The dream-like feeling which had hitherto possessed me was dispelled at once; and the full conviction of all that I had lost forced itself glaringly upon me. It is so difficult at first to comprehend the reality of death by your own side, at your own hearth, invading your very circle, and gliding closely by you as you wander beneath your paternal roof. Seeing about you, on every hand, a thousand trifling and apparently frail objects, the property of the departed, it seems impossible that such toys, such very nothings, can have survived their owner; but the crape, the bombazeen, the banded hair, and all the conventionalities of the garb of grief, put to flight at once the flattering delusion. You bear the symbols of death upon you, and you can deceive yourself no longer.

Three days afterwards, Lady Madelaine arrived at Rooksley. She looked surpassingly beautiful in her widow's dress, which was not at that period the slight and elegantly-varied costume which it has become in these days. Her splendid hair was entirely hidden; not a glimpse of her swan-like throat was visible; and thus the triumph of her loveliness was complete. She appeared conscious of the fact, and was evidently pleased by the look of astonished admiration with which I met her. I have already stated that she had never loved my father, even in the first days of their marriage; nor did she now assume a demeanour of deep grief, or affect any excess of sorrow. She was calm, composed, and courteous; although it was easy to perceive that she shrank painfully from the denuded aspect of everything about her, and received the greeting of her half-sister with a thrill of disgust. She examined Adela with more curiosity than interest; and there was indifference as well as coldness in the solitary kiss which she imprinted on her forehead. Chilling as it was, however, it evidently sufficed to satisfy her daughter, who, after this brief welcome to her maternal home, silently and placidly resumed her seat.

To me her manner, although betraying no vestige of affection, was nevertheless more cordial. She even smiled, as she scrutinized my appear-

ance ; and then, throwing herself back listlessly in her chair, she abandoned herself to thought. No one presumed to intrude upon her reverie. With all her self-command and mechanism of feeling, it was impossible that she could remain unmoved at the sight of the once splendid and still noble home which a fond and hopeful husband had provided for her in the first blaze of her youth and beauty.

At such a moment, human nature will assert itself even in the coldest hearts. It is true that this home was still hers ; but he who had so proudly made her its mistress could welcome her there no more. There might long have ceased to be even the semblance of affection between them, but mutual admiration and esteem must have continued to the last. Moreover, the force of habit is powerful with us all ; more powerful than we are willing to believe until we are compelled to test its truth. I felt glad to see that my mother was not altogether beyond its influence ; and to me that deep, and silent, and motionless reverie appeared almost holy.

On the morrow, I was suddenly summoned to her dressing-room, just as I had returned from a hurried visit to the lake, and was engaged in reading a letter from Devereux, in which he informed me that, having learnt the arrival of Lady Made-

laine, he could no longer risk remaining in the village, conscious as he was that the discovery of his presence there would inevitably ruin our hopes. He said much also to console me for his temporary absence, for which he had before prepared me; and, finally, entreated me to believe that no change either of time or place could for one moment operate upon his affection. I had shed many and bitter tears over this letter, which terminated with an entreaty that I would deposit my reply in the course of the day at the accustomed spot; and give him an assurance of my acquiescence in his plans, and my own resolution to bear with hope and patience the trials which might possibly await me until we again met.

I was ill-prepared to meet my mother at such a moment; for, aware of the indignation with which she would visit my clandestine correspondence with a man whom she had driven from her house, and treated with a contempt and contumely which he was never likely to forgive; conscious, too, that some accident might have betrayed my secret, in which case the whole weight of her displeasure must necessarily fall upon myself, at a moment when I had no one near to mitigate its bitterness, or to support me under its infliction, I had scarcely power to obey her bidding. There was, however, no alternative; so, hastily bathing my eyes in cold

water, and throwing off my bonnet, I proceeded with a slow and uncertain step to her apartment.

“Why do you approach me like a criminal, Eveleen?” she asked hastily, as she extended her hand on my entrance; “have you forgotten that I am now your only parent, and that I have a right to expect a friend in my daughter? You are no longer a child: in another month you will be sixteen years of age;” and she sighed as she said it. “Draw a chair to my side. It is now time that we should understand each other. I shall, in all probability, pass some months here, and I can only look to you for companionship. But first, tell me, have you caused the orders which I sent down through Dale to be obeyed? I allude to the room of——”

“All has been done precisely as you directed;” I replied, considerably relieved to find that the summons of Lady Madelaine bore no relation to my treasured secret; “and as you will, perhaps, wish to visit it,” I continued, drawing the key from my pocket, “you will require this.”

My mother waved it back with her hand. “As you assure me that all proper respect has been paid to Mr. Tilden in the eyes of the establishment, I am satisfied with that assurance. I cannot volunteer an additional and useless trial of my nerves.

But why is this key in your possession? Have you closed the room?"

"I have," was my confused reply.

"And wherefore?"

"I intreat you to pardon me if I have done amiss; " I said tremblingly; "but there is now one inmate at Rooksley, whose cold and dictatorial comments I could not brook in this case, although, in all others, I have submitted to them with what patience I could assume, out of respect for yourself."

"You allude to Lady Flora?"

"I do."

"She is then obnoxious to you?"

"Detestable!"

"A strong term for a lady's lips, Miss Tilden; but I fear, from the brief experience of last evening, too easily to be excused. It is strange how time softens down the different objects which make up the picture of the past! I fancied that Lady Flora was, at least, endurable; and that, although not a person whom I should be anxious to present in public, I might with safety contemplate her companionship during a period of retirement. It would appear, however, that I have deceived myself, and that, when I shuddered at the memory of Miss Margery Macspleuchan, I might have included her niece in the emotion."

“Whatever cause of offence towards yourself you had discovered in me previously to our last parting,” I said somewhat haughtily, “your ladyship was amply revenged from the moment that Lady Flora Glenfillan became an inmate of Rooksley.”

“Poor Eveleen!” said my mother with a low mocking laugh; “you have then been punished bitterly? It is by no means to be deplored, however; you required a check-rein, and I had neither time nor talent to apply it. But what of your sister?”

“I know nothing of her.”

“Your answer is singular! Have you not lived under the same roof for months? How, then, can you make so absurd a reply?”

“Simply, because I speak the truth; and, moreover, I would decline to express even the inferences which I may have formed of her character.”

“I can fully understand that she is both shy and ignorant. I must get her off my hands as I best can; which, thanks to her fortune, I am sure to do at last.”

I felt that I smiled, for I had a firm conviction that Miss Adela Tilden was not a person to be “got off the hands” even of a Lady Madelaine, should she not herself so will it.

“She is very plain and awkward;” pursued my

mother, as she glanced at her own lovely reflection in the cheval glass which was placed before her sofa : " I know not who she resembles."

" She has fine eyes?"

" Indeed ! Well, that is something in her favour ; but she is *gauche*, and ill at ease."

" As regards the latter feeling I can say nothing, but I must venture to differ from your ladyship respecting the *gaucherie*. At your first meeting, Adela may have been agitated, and consequently have appeared to disadvantage ; but, generally speaking, her great charm lies in her gracefulness."

" I wish that you may, in a year or two, be able to persuade the men of all this, for you seem to be quite *engouée* of Lady Flora's pupil ; but I confess that I despair of effecting any such result. I see nothing in your sister but a plain, gawky, overgrown girl, shy in her manner, and sullen in her deportment. I detest such still life."

For the second time I could have laughed outright, but I restrained the impulse ; for, not only was I too proud to prejudice Lady Madelaine still more against my sister (had it been possible), but also, however gracious she might be at the moment, my memory fell back upon other scenes, which I had not yet either forgotten or forgiven ; and I resolved to let her purchase her experience of Adela's real nature as I had done. I therefore weighed

every word before I uttered it ; nor did I add to the evident disgust of my mother towards the wayward but unfortunate girl, by one syllable of comment upon the hatred which she nourished to all who now bore the name of Tilden.

As yet Lady Madelaine had been unable to observe the great change which had been wrought in the domestic arrangements of the establishment, for she had taken both her supper of the previous evening and her morning chocolate in her dressing-room. Great as was the resistance made by the household, they had not ventured to defy the authority of Lady Flora Glenfillan altogether ; she had, moreover, profited by the period of consternation and depression which had elapsed since my father's death, to enforce her authority more stringently than before ; and the appointments, as well as the supplies of the first repast at which my mother assisted *en famille*, consequently filled her with indignation and disgust.

“ Is this a meditated insult, sir ? ” she asked, as, after glancing over the table, she rose from her seat, and turned haughtily towards poor Bottlemore, who was about to commence his duties ; “ did you imagine that in becoming a widow I also became a pauper ? Was it not enough that you have denuded, or enveloped with paltry coverings and contrivances, every room at Rooksley ;

but must I, moreover, be expected to preside at a repast to which I would not condemn my own servants?"

"The orders of my Lady Flora have been strictly obeyed, my lady;" replied the butler, in a tone which savoured strongly of triumph; "her ladyship has been peremptory on the subject of the bill of fare, and I could do no more, consistently with my respect for your ladyship's sister, than remonstrate, which I have done in vain."

"Enough, Mr. Bottlemore;" said my mother, as she turned with a stately gesture to leave the room. "I will retire to my own apartments until Mrs. Locksley has caused the saloon to be made habitable, which you will instruct her to do forthwith; and let another dinner be served two hours hence, for which I shall not need to blush before my own daughters."

Bottlemore bowed low, and held the door open during a few seconds, in order that his lady might pass; but, as she suddenly paused in the centre of the floor when she ceased speaking, after satisfying himself of the fact, he silently withdrew, followed by his subordinates.

"One word more bearing upon the same disgraceful subject;" pursued Lady Madelaine, when the door was again closed; "I expect also, that those with whom I am to sit down to table will

appear as gentlewomen, and never presume, in my house, to affect a costume suited only to the servants' offices ; and that my entrance-hall may not be degraded into a depository for filthy woollen garments, as it was this morning when I passed through from the grounds."

" Filthy woollen garments, my Lady Madeleine !" almost shrieked the crestfallen Lady Flora, while the red spot burnt upon her brow : " sure it's uncanny in your father's child to ca' it by sic' a name—Why, woman, yon's the Glenfillan tartan !"

" I would advise you, in that case, to send it home ;" said my mother with cool and withering contempt ; " or, should you prefer to do so, *wear* it home ; unless you have also provided yourself with a Macspleuchan plaid, as a more consistent covering."

The dragon was fairly silenced, for she felt no inclination to sacrifice the luxuries of Rooksley to a sarcasm ; and five minutes afterwards we had all quitted the dining-room. Lady Flora's reign was over.

CHAPTER VIII.

One only interruption broke in upon our hermit-like retirement, and that one was the apparition of Lady O'Halloran ; who was so coldly received that she never repeated her visit. The fastidiousness of my mother was so deeply wounded by the ignorance and vulgarity of her relative, that she could not brook an appearance in her society. This was not, however, the only cause of her discourtesy to her husband's friend. I had mentioned to her the interest and kindness which both Adela and myself had experienced from Lady O'Halloran, and she had listened with complacency, if not with utter indifference ; but I had no sooner added that a letter from my father had induced it, than I saw a cloud gather upon her brow. Mr. Tilden had thwarted her wishes ; nay, he had even incited one who, to her, was comparatively a stranger, to infringe her express commands ; and thenceforth she looked upon the well-meaning and warm-hearted woman

with a feeling of distrust and avoidance. *Au reste*, half the county families left their cards at the lodges, but contented themselves with that ceremonious demonstration; Lady Madelaine had never been more to them than the wife of Mr. Tilden; and with his death terminated all their interest in Rooksley.

Five lines will suffice to assure the reader that my mother could not long endure such a state of things as this; and, accordingly, a very few weeks had elapsed since her arrival before she began to exhibit weariness of her daughters and of every thing about her. She had paraded the dull luxury of her mourning equipage and liveries through the county town, already astir with the preparations for a new election. She had exchanged visiting-tickets with all her acquaintance; she had, in short, exhausted her own resources and those of the neighbourhood; and she no longer knew how to dispose of her existence. Her temper suffered greatly under these circumstances; and I began to marvel how long I should be enabled to endure its exactions, when one morning, unexpectedly to all, save Lady Madelaine herself, Sir James Dornton was announced. No event could have been more welcome, for we were all literally wasting our lives in lethargy and discomfort. Our party was not only ill-assorted, but actually antipathetical; and we lived on, in the

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their evident avoidance of so natural a topic ; but after a time, wearied by a thousand useless conjectures of the how and where Lady Flora and my sister had previously met him, I became interested in spite of myself by the dialogue which they maintained. I heard again the names of persons who had once been known to me ; and of a world with which I had long panted to make acquaintance. Sir James was caustic and brilliant ; and his quiet sarcasm, biting though it was, lent a zest and a raciness to all he said. My mother was once more in her proper element. She felt that she was to her own set as a lost pleiad of brilliancy and fashion ; and that her return to the great world would be hailed with gladness. Dornton was most assiduous in strengthening this belief ; and, with a tact which spoke volumes for his *savoir vivre*, he contrived to speak far more of herself than of any of those whom he passed under review. Lady Flora, meanwhile, worked on in silence, or occasionally addressed a few words in an under-tone to Adela ; who, since the entrance of our new guest, had scarcely raised her eyes from the floor.

Despite my own interest in the conversation, I confess that I felt somewhat piqued at the marked neglect which I experienced from this *preux chevalier* of fashion, who, two years before, had condescended to exert his powers for my sole amuse-

ment ; and who now had neither word nor look for any one save my mother.

All the dignity of my sixteen years revolted against this inconsistency : and the consciousness of possessing both grace and beauty added bitterness to the mortification. I never thought him less attractive. I had, moreover, ample time for all my reflections, for no change took place throughout the evening, nor did either himself or Lady Madelaine move from their seats, until he rose, announcing that he had secured an apartment at the Tilden Arms in the village ; and would, with her ladyship's permission, join our breakfast-table in the morning.

I was employed until I fell asleep that night, in marvelling at the acquaintanceship which existed between Sir James Dornton and my relatives. Where they could have met baffled all my conjectures. That his name had never been mentioned by either of them was less surprising, for we exchanged little conversation and less confidence. Still, I felt that the circumstance was in itself singular ; and the habits and haunts of Dornton considered, altogether inexplicable. Then flashed across me new matter of marvel. Since Lady Madelaine saw fit to receive male guests at Rooksey so early in her widowhood, how chanced it that Lord Otterford was not her first visitor ?

I knew nothing of the scene at the Putney villa ; and I could not reconcile the present with the past, otherwise than by presuming that the extreme intimacy which had existed between my mother and the latter rendered her scrupulous in receiving him during her first period of mourning.

Sir James remained at Rooksley four days, on the last of which he was closeted with Lady Madelaine for a considerable time. When they rejoined the family, there was a faint flush on the cheek of my mother, and a bright light in her eye, which gave her a look of unusual animation ; while Sir James was comparatively silent and depressed. The evening passed heavily enough, although Lady Madelaine exerted herself most unwontedly to enliven it. To me she was unusually gracious ; indeed, at times almost affectionate ; yet I fancied that all her gaiety was assumed. It was, at all events, very evident that something extraordinary had taken place between the friends, but what that something might be I was not destined to discover ; as, after the departure of Sir James, she made no allusion whatever to the circumstance, contenting herself with quiet comments on his fashion and high breeding, and his great conversational powers.

Two months subsequently, Lady Madelaine declared that her health and spirits were both giving way under the dull monotony of Rooksley, where

no object of interest presented itself to divert her mind from the painful memory of the past, but where, on the contrary, everything tended to remind her of her husband. Neither, she asserted, could she longer brook the society of Lady Flora ; and therefore, in self-defence, she must make some other arrangement.

The day after this decision, she despatched a long letter to Lady Devereux. My heart beat quick as I read the superscription. What had I not both to hope and to fear, should she have volunteered a visit to the mother of Herbert ! And then I asked myself, would she go alone ?—would she forget, during how many long months I had been subjected to the very companionship from which she was herself about to escape ? Was I still, at the age of sixteen, to be immured in the solitude of Booksley, far from the delightful world which I was prepared to worship ? Surely not—Lady Madelaine could have no such design ; and there could be no doubt that I should bear her company. The image of my young lover presided over all these speculations. Under his mother's roof we could not fail to meet ; and I felt satisfied that Lady Devereux, when she saw me improved in beauty, and admired, as I never doubted that I must be, would gladly welcome such a wife for her son. Of my fortune I never thought, nor did I even suspect that others would

do so : I was like the heroines of romance, to be loved for myself alone.

I cradled myself so readily and so softly in these pleasant fancies, that my disappointment was indescribable when my mother at last announced, after a lively correspondence with her favourite friend, that on the morrow she should leave Rooksley for a time, desiring that all the necessary arrangements might be immediately commenced.

“ Does your ladyship go alone ? ” I inquired imprudently.

“ Certainly not, Miss Tilden. I am not in the habit of travelling without proper attendance. Dale, who accompanied me from town, will also attend me to Lady Devereux's. My appearance in Grosvenor Square, or at Putney is, of course, at this moment out of the question ; and I shall consequently remain at her place in retirement, until the first year of my mourning has expired, unless I feel sufficient courage to venture once to return here. At all events, you will be informed of my movements when it becomes necessary ; and meanwhile, Eveleen, I have to beg that you will be assiduous in improving yourself in every way. You do not do yourself justice ; and remember that you cannot live all your life at Rooksley, nor is it possible that I should present any child of mine in the world unless she is prepared to do me credit. You

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expose yourself too much to the sun and wind, and I have remarked that you frequently take off your gloves, when there is no perceptible necessity for your doing so. These are plebeian habits, and must be conquered. Do not let me have to repeat my caution."

This was the moral lesson with which my mother took leave of me, at an age when the imagination is stronger than the reason, and the unoccupied fancy roves wildly through a future which is only dimly guessed at. I was to cultivate my beauty; to sacrifice everything, even my most innocent pleasure, that of enjoying nature in all her various moods and phases, to the one great end of making a figure in that world from which I was so coldly shut out, at an age when, as I thoroughly believed, I was the best able to appreciate its delights. My old suspicion came back upon me with renewed strength. Lady Madelaine was jealous of my attractions! There was triumph in the conviction, whatever annoyance there might be in the result. Not one word of admonition had she uttered to Adela. It was plain that she considered *que le jeu ne valait pas la chandelle*. Only, indeed, upon one solitary occasion had she appeared to take the slightest interest in her younger daughter, and it was even then exhibited in a cold and business-like manner, which, courageously as she struggled

to conceal the feeling, evidently aroused all the harsher emotions of my sister.

“ I suppose you are delighted with Rooksley, Adela ; it must have appeared a charming contrast from Glenfillan. How do you amuse yourself ? ”

“ I read and work, madam. ”

“ You are a good musician, of course ? ”

“ By no means. ”

“ A cool answer truly, child ! How do you expect to pass through the world without so necessary an accomplishment ? ”

Adela only replied by raising her head, with one of her peculiar smiles—a smile which might mean much, or nothing.

“ You draw, at least ? ”

“ Scarcely ; but sufficiently to occupy me when I am driven to do so, as a resource against idleness. ”

“ Better and better ; ” exclaimed Lady Madelaine in a tone of irritation ; “ and do you suppose that it was to produce such a result as this that I permitted you to have a governess ? May I venture to inquire what the lady in question *did* succeed in teaching you ? ”

“ To read, and to think, madam, ” answered Adela with a cold emphasis.

“ The training of a Sunday-school girl ! ” exclaimed Lady Madelaine contemptuously ; “ I am

glad that at least we now perfectly understand each other."

And thus ended this catechetical dialogue. My mother had unhesitatingly received the evidence of Adela as conclusive, and gave herself no trouble to test its truth.

My disappointment and mortification on finding myself once more abandoned to the monotony of Rooksley, when I had argued myself into the belief that Lady Madelaine would profit by her peculiar position to accustom me by degrees to the world, by that *vie du chateau* which is in itself a miniature of fashionable life and manners, were so great that I could not endure them in silence. My woman-dignity was wounded; and, still worse my heart was wrung. All my happy dreams had melted away. I was like Apollo cast out of Olympus. Lady O'Halloran, probably uninformed of my mother's departure, had not made her appearance at Rooksley; I shrank from putting myself into the power of Adela; for, since our last interview in my chamber, I had learnt to fear her. Such, nevertheless, was finally my fate; for I continued silent so long, that my health gave way under the violence of my emotions. On the second day of my non-appearance in the drawing-room, I received a cold and ceremonious request from my sister, through Joséphine, that I would allow her to visit

me. I had already become so weary of myself and of my own thoughts, that I gladly welcomed the proposal; and, in five minutes, my sister made her appearance! She assumed no semblance of affection—she affected no tone of sympathy. There was, on the contrary, an irritation and bitterness about her which it was difficult to brook.

“Something has disturbed you, Adela;” I said, in order to terminate the long and uncomfortable silence which succeeded our first civil greetings; “is it in my power to remove the annoyance?”

“You are wrong, Eveleen;” was the reply; “and have not taken time to reflect, that the sameness of our existence here scarcely admits of any annoyance, to which it would not be a weakness to yield; while I cannot, like yourself, have any external anxiety to trouble me.”

“External anxiety!” I repeated in alarm.

“Even so. You have already lived in the world. You were fourteen years of age when you were deprived of the pleasures of your childhood. You were a genius and a beauty, an *enfant monstre*; attracting all eyes, and trained to profit by your advantages. You can scarcely have escaped bringing some regret with you into retirement.”

I looked at her in astonishment. Did she suspect my secret? or, could it be that this little

mountain recluse, this shy, unformed girl, already knew more of human nature than myself?

“I was, at least, young enough to have escaped all serious homage, I should suppose,” I answered.

“Perhaps;” said Adela, doubtingly; “yet at such an age all homage is considered serious.”

I became more and more bewildered.

“Do you speak from experience?” I asked sarcastically.

“Draw your own conclusions, after you have reasoned the probabilities;” was her quiet reply; but I did not come here to talk of myself. I judge merely by analogy.”

“By analogy?”

“Certainly. If books be no tutors, why should we waste our lives in studying their pages?”

“You are right, Adela,” I exclaimed abruptly; “why should I refuse to acknowledge that you are right? I have—I did bring to my retirement a deep—a gnawing regret. It is true, that the little I yet know of life I learnt under this same roof; but Rooksley is no longer what it was. To me the transition was like that of the disembodied soul passing from earth to Hades. Had it been a mere idle, girlish caprice, undiscovered and unreturned, my pride would have enabled me to conquer it at

once, for I should have scorned myself; but with me it was—it is—far otherwise.”

As I spoke I looked towards my sister for sympathy, and I was astonished to perceive that a burning blush had risen to her forehead. She was silent, and, as it seemed to me, unable to reply. I began to re-consider my words, but I could discover nothing in them to induce this extraordinary demonstration. Adela was a mere child when she first came to Rooksley; Glenfillan was, I well knew, a hermitage as regarded the world; for herself, therefore, it was impossible that she should blush. I knew not what inference to draw. I became restless and uneasy: and still she sat silently beside my bed, buried in thought, with the blood crimsoning her brow.

“You are ungrateful to repine, Eveleen;” she said at length abruptly, as though no pause had taken place in our conversation; “for, if you feel, not only that you have loved, but that you have been beloved in your turn, with you happiness is a mere question of time; and Sir James Dornton may well afford to wait for awhile, when conscious of success at last.”

My share in the dialogue seemed fated to be merely ejaculatory.

“Sir James Dornton!” I echoed vehemently, as

by a sudden movement I raised myself from my recumbent position.

“Are you not to be his wife?”

“I would rather die ten thousand deaths!”

“And yet you joined in all the laudatory comments uttered by Lady Madelaine after he left Rooksley.”

“I did so with sincerity. He has truly the good qualities for which she gave him credit; but I could never love him.”

“Do not assume too much. Habit and perseverance may induce you to feel differently.”

“Never!”

“And yet, he is handsome, fashionable, and attractive.”

“It may be so—it is;” I conceded, overcome by the subtil tactics of a mere girl, and resolved to pour out my whole heart before her; “yet still I persist in my declaration, that I could never love Sir James Dornton.”

“But should the indomitable will of our mother so order it?”

“It would only lead to a vain struggle on her part. I would concede nothing.”

“Eveleen, you deceive yourself;” said my sister eagerly; “you do not possess the strength of character for which you would fain give yourself

credit ; you have not the moral courage to stand alone in such an unequal contest."

" I shall not stand alone," I answered proudly.

" Then, indeed, have I hopes of you ;" said Adela with increased energy ; " for all is easy where you are convinced of being beloved. Every trial that does not touch the one you love, is light, and may be borne bravely ; external griefs cease to terrify and subdue, and graze but little the surface of a heart which is filled by one image, while they have no power to pierce it."

" How know you this ?" I inquired in my surprise.

" I feel that it must be so. Such a fact requires no teaching. Trust me, Eveleen, I am conscious from my privation that it must be so."

" Adela, I shall never understand you."

" I believe it."

" Never did I expect such sentiments from your lips. You, a mere girl, secluded from your earliest years—without knowledge of the world—without experience—"

" What do you understand by experience ? by knowledge of the world ? They may be good safeguards, as I construe the words, against deception, dissimulation, and wrong ; but the heart alone is needed in the subject which we are now discussing ; and, consequently, the heart which has been self-

formed in solitude will be more capable of a deep and lasting affection than that which has been fashioned by the qualities to which you attach so high a value. We shall, perhaps, in after-life, ourselves afford an illustration of what I advance."

"And how?"

"Simply by the disparity of our tastes and habits. You will love your husband, I doubt not; but you will also love many other things; pleasure, and dissipation, and the admiration of the world; from all of which I should shrink with loathing, because they would tend to divert my thoughts from the one great object of my devotion."

"It is easy to see, my poor Adela," I said with a smile of pity, "that your love is, so far, all theory. You would soon descend from your pedestal, had you once tasted the delights of all that you now affect to despise; or you would become the most miserable woman upon earth. With your whole soul wrapt up in one object (prettily as the phrase sounds), his absence would infallibly destroy you. Had you suffered what I have already done, you would ere now have ceased to exist."

"Not if I were assured that I was really loved—and this has brought us back to the commencement of our argument—I should then have strength to meet any trial."

“ Even the opposition of our mother ? ”

“ Yes ; for I could wait until it was overcome.”

“ All your life perhaps.”

“ Scarcely, for I should know that there must come a period when the law would liberate me from the thrall of Lady Madelaine ; for the present, I would say, until the proper time arrives, my best text is—patience.”

“ Very prudent and proper ;” said I disdainfully ; “ but who shall protect you in the meanwhile from some other marriage of Lady Madelaine’s own devising ? While you are exercising your minority in this new kind of philosophy, she may compel you to become the wife of a man whose very name you may consider odious.”

“ Compel me, did you say ? You do indeed not understand me. I am younger than yourself, Eveleen, in years ; but my mind and heart were educated amid the grand and wild scenes of nature, amid an almost unbroken solitude, and under unkindness and neglect—not in a drawing-room, where every toy distracts the thoughts and disturbs the fancy. Mine was a stern tutorage, but it did its work. You have been the pupil of the world, which has done its work also. You have been warned to hide yourself from both sun and wind—I have stood beneath a shelf of rock, and braved the thunder-storm. And do you think that when the

whole happiness of my life may be poised upon one point, that I shall hesitate to secure it? Believe me, that there can be little moral energy, little delicacy, and still less good sense, in throwing yourself away, at the will of another—nor is it honest to utter vows which are sure to be broken by so weak and unstable a nature; and to pledge yourself to form the happiness of a husband, when you are not even able to assure your own.”

I was at once bewildered and silent. Could this indeed be Adela? I felt as if under the influence of magic. I remembered her usual cold, abstracted indifference—I recalled her bitter energy during our last *tête-à-tête*—and I could not reconcile the discrepancies of her character. I was, however, painfully conscious of her mental superiority. I felt the insufficiency of my eldership; I was mastered by a stronger spirit than my own. I could have wept with mortification. I had talked bravely; but it was because the sound of my own words lent me courage for the moment; for I well knew that cowardice was still at the bottom of my heart; I had never reduced my feelings to reason; I could not, as she did, make a principle of my conduct, and experience a sense of self-respect to sustain my actions; when once my pride failed, my strength was exhausted.

I was of a weak and yielding disposition, and

constantly required support, and my sister had now assumed an attitude which led me to seek it at her hands. That she felt no affection for me, she had been too frank to conceal ; but I tremblingly confessed to myself that if I could secure her friendship, I should save myself, in all probability, from a dangerous enemy. Adela already possessed a glimpse of my secret, and I easily convinced myself that its safety could be hereafter secured only by an unlimited confidence. Full of this feeling, I therefore gave free course to my communication. I told her of Devereux's first appearance at Rooksley ; of the irritation of Lady Madelaine, who, after having for a time made a jest of our growing inclination, ultimately saw fit to resent it with a vehemence which led her to forbid the entrance of the house to the son of her own friend ; and then, but with considerably less fluency, I admitted the fact of our late correspondence ; and avowed my firm faith in Devereux's attachment and perseverance.

CHAPTER IX.

I derived no assistance from my auditor throughout the narrative, either in word or look. She listened attentively, absorbedly, but she uttered no comment, she made no gesture of surprise or interest: it was only when, with a flushed brow and quickened breath, I had reached the termination of my story, that she spoke; and not even then until, after the pause of a moment, she had convinced herself that I had indeed no more to tell.

“ Poor Eveleen !” she exclaimed at last ; “ you have truly profited by an education based on flattery, and perfected by novel-writers, to have thus succeeded in weaving out a romance for yourself amid the seclusion of Rooksley. I cannot sufficiently admire your skill ! It was a wonderful achievement to contemplate at fourteen. But are you sure that Herbert Devereux was, and is, the hero of this history ?”

“ What can you mean to imply, Adela !”

“ Nothing ; my words convey no implication. I asked a plain and simple question ; and I moreover request of you to answer it frankly and truthfully.”

“ I have told you nothing but the truth.”

“ I am bound to believe your assertion ; and the rather that such a confidence as you have just made unasked would be a useless and idle weakness on your part, if you still sought to deceive me. Do you now ask my advice, or my assistance ?”

“ I am ready to listen to your advice ; and may, perhaps, ere long be under the necessity of requesting your assistance ; but what I now desire is simply your opinion.”

“ Upon what point ?”

“ Upon every one connected with the entanglement.”

“ Entanglement ! You do not then, yourself, consider the affair as serious ?”

“ You are mistaken. I am, on my side, perfectly serious ; nor have I any reason to believe that Mr. Devereux is less so.”

“ We had better then, under those circumstances, call it an engagement.”

“ Call it what you please.”

“ Then my opinion is that, so far as it has gone, it is remarkably romantic.”

“ But what think you,” I asked with some irri-

tation, "of the inconsistency of our mother, who, after having jestingly encouraged our mutual liking, should suddenly find in it a cause of wrath and resentment?"

"I confess that an accusation of inconsistency, when brought against Lady Madelaine, somewhat startles me. I had not hitherto believed that feminine failing to be one of her peculiarities. I never made the experience myself, for, in my own case, her conduct has ever been uniform in all respects; nor do I think that, in this occurrence, she can rightly be accused of it. The miniature flirtation of two comparative children amused her, and diverted her friends. Dancing dogs and quack doctors are never, as you are well aware, admitted beyond the lodges of Rooksley; and people of taste and fashion must be provided with entertainment of some description. But when it became apparent that the boy and girl considered themselves and each other as man and woman—then, indeed, the affair assumed a very different aspect. Did you expect that Lady Madelaine Tilden had any ambition to be a grandmother before she was five and thirty?"

I was stung to the very quick. This was not the tone in which I had expected my sister to reply to the confidence I had reposed in her. I shrank before the ridicule which lurked in her tone and words.

“ I care not to speculate upon our mother’s feelings ;” I said pettishly ; “ I wished to know your opinion of my own position.”

“ I do not think that you need to disturb yourself on that head ;” was the rejoinder ; “ after Mr. Devereux saw and admired you, he probably transferred his gaze and his admiration to the scarlet coat which succeeded you. Nothing could be more natural at his age.”

“ How, then,” I asked with offended dignity, “ do you account for his appearance here, and the correspondence which ensued ?”

“ A love of the new and the mysterious, perhaps ; or restlessness, and weariness of town, for the season was just about to close.”

“ You think then that I am to be made a dupe ?”

“ You must yourself decide that point. Your fate is in your own hands in this case, at least.”

“ But you believe that he never really loved me ?”

“ I am merely inclined to imagine that, at such an age, and under such circumstances, a mutual inclination like yours would scarcely admit a name.”

“ I am nevertheless convinced of his affection.”

“ In that conviction you cannot do better than encourage a renewal of his attentions. You must

be sure of success now, when time can only have increased your talent in winning hearts."

The bitterness of this epigram made me furious; but I was too proud to discover to my sister the extent of her triumph; and I remained perfectly silent, until she rose from her chair, when, as she prepared to leave the room, she said calmly: "End as it may, your secret is safe with me, Eveleen; and, as I before said, do not let it distress you. It is a marriage that Lady Madelaine will never allow. She has other and more ambitious views for you. If I can be of service in the mean time, while this love still struggles and exists, make use of me; you may depend upon my sincerity." And before I could utter a word in reply, she was gone.

How heartily did I then regret that I had placed myself so thoroughly in her power! Not one expression of sympathy, not one sentence of affection, had escaped her. I had forfeited my independence. I had wilfully woven the thrall about me: nor was Adela a likely person to allow me to overlook the fact. From the day on which this conversation took place, our relative position was altogether changed. I ceased to contend. I adopted her ideas, coincided in her opinions, and deferred to her tastes. She, on her side, tacitly accepted my concessions, and no longer avoided my society; talking to me continually, whenever we were *tête-à-tête*, of

Devereux ; and cleverly increasing, by apparently unconscious comments, the extent of the regard which she constantly affected to discourage. As I have, I believe, said more than once already, she was incomprehensible. Nevertheless, there was, from this very line of conduct, a fascination in her companionship which I was unable to resist. She never spoke of herself. She had displayed no answering trust in me. She seemed anxious to forget her own identity. And thus, we talked incessantly upon the one engrossing subject of Devereux's attachment.

“ Where is he now ?” she asked one morning, as we were strolling in the grounds. “ In order to secure a prize for which all the world are destined to contend, he should be no laggard. He must be well aware that Lady Madelaine is not at Rooksley ; he must have seen her at his mother's. How is it then that he does not profit by so favourable an opportunity of renewing his suit ?”

As she spoke, we were approaching one of the lodges, which was just then under repair ; but, as the early dinner-bell had rung, the workmen were all absent ; and we consequently continued our walk without hesitation. The building was known as the wood-lodge, from the circumstance of its standing on the edge of an extensive plantation of ornamental timber, and was, in itself, an extremely

pretty object. Adela had been silent more than a minute, but I attempted no reply, for just at the instant my eye caught the figure of a tall man crouching among the underwood. He wore a blue gabardine, a glazed hat with a wide border pulled low upon his forehead, and carried in his hand a formidable bludgeon ; but what rendered his appearance more singular, and less alarming than it would otherwise have been, was the fact that at the precise moment in which he caught my attention, he raised a telescope to his eye, and appeared to be taking an earnest view of the windows of the house. As he dropped it, his gaze was riveted upon me, and I saw him start with surprise and make a step towards me ; when, suddenly becoming aware of the presence of a second person, he stopped as abruptly as he had been about to approach.

A sudden tremour took possession of me. I dared not believe that my suspicion was correct. I could only murmur out : “ How like, and yet it cannot be ! ”

“ What cannot be ? ” asked my sister.

“ That man — that peasant — do you see him, Adela ? Do my eyes cheat me, or is it really Devereux ? ”

Taught by these words that my companion knew all our secret, the intruder hesitated no longer.

“ Yes ; it is indeed Devereux ; ” he answered,

springing towards me, while I stood transfixed with terror and astonishment. "It is indeed myself. Have I not earned the right to make this attempt by the weeks and months of wretchedness that I have lately passed? Does it seem so strange to your heart, Eveleen, that it refuses to welcome me?"

"You wrong me, Herbert."

"I must believe so; for I cannot afford to fritter away one brief interval of happiness in doubt. But why these tears? why this violent emotion? Compose yourself, I beseech of you, and listen to me calmly, for a few moments must decide both my fate and your own. In an hour I must be once more on my way to town, where I shall only arrive in time to join my regiment before it marches to Dublin. I do not ask you to write to me; I dare not. The hazard of discovery would be too great; and I am not selfish enough to involve you in unnecessary risk for my own gratification. Nor will I write myself. A letter intercepted by Lady Madelaine must inevitably expose you to her resentment; but I swear, by all that I most revere on earth, never to become the husband of any other woman than yourself. You have already given me the same pledge, but it was only in writing, Eveleen—I saw it, but I did not hear it; and it is to do this, to hear the same vow uttered by your

lips, that I am now here. The sounds will dwell in my ear for ever, and be the solace of my absence. Surely, you will not refuse me this? Surely you will not shrink at such a moment from the ratification of your own generous and voluntary pledge?" And he looked earnestly and tenderly into my face, as he raised my hand with ardour to his lips.

I was silent.

"Have you not the courage to repeat your promise?" he asked somewhat impatiently. "Was the vow traced by your pen not intended to be irrevocable? Have you hitherto been merely sporting with a passion which you professed to share? Eveleen, I will not believe you so unworthy!"

"I am helpless," I at length murmured out, as I evaded his fixed and searching gaze.

"Helpless!" echoed Devereux indignantly; "show me the being, either of your sex or of mine, who is not helpless, if unwilling to exert that moral courage which makes its own strength, and creates its own freedom! Do not be self-deceived, Eveleen; do not wilfully or weakly close your eyes before you give me a final answer, to the trials to which, as my affianced wife, you will undoubtedly be exposed ere long. Do not conceal from yourself the difficulties with which you will have to contend, in order to secure the inviolability of your plighted word. I am too unselfish to inflict

upon you the necessity of either falsehood on the one hand, or repentance on the other. If there must be a victim, I am prepared to become the sacrifice—my own misery will be enough, without the addition of yours.”

I only wept.

“ When my departure from town has taken place,” pursued Herbert, “ and your mother’s year of mourning has expired, she will, beyond doubt, desire your society, and you will be launched into the ocean of a London life, where nothing will be left undone to seduce your fancy, and to intimidate your will. Lady Madelaine will, probably, employ both menace and authority ; she may even condemn you once more, for a time, to the seclusion of Rooksley—she may endeavour to pervert your truth by flattering your vanity or your ambition. You see how fully, how earnestly, I have calculated all these contingencies—not coldly, Eveleen ; of that you cannot suspect me, but with a burning brow and a throbbing pulse.—All this may—*must*, I fear, be the consequence of your truth to me—but surely, my own love, I can at least offer you the recompense of your noble sacrifice ! No care, no tenderness, no devotion shall be spared when you are indeed my wife ; my love shall make you forget even the price at which it was purchased. My gratitude shall be undying, like my affection. Your happiness shall

be the one great effort and ambition of my whole life. Speak—I have been frank and honest, though it has cost me a bitter pang. I have done my duty; and now my fate is in your hands. You know that you have been the first and only vision of my soul. Speak—and make me at once the happiest or the most wretched of my sex!”

Again his eyes were fastened eagerly upon me. I felt his arm about my waist: I was faint and giddy. My cowardice was upon me. I had no longer a will, nor a wish. I riveted my gaze upon the earth. I gasped out I knew not what of the pain which his want of confidence had given me. He eagerly pressed me to be frank; to be just alike to him and to myself; and I felt inclined to promise all he asked, but my fear was greater than my passion.

“Speak for me, Miss Tilden!” he exclaimed, turning vehemently towards my sister; “if I have, indeed, so soon and so utterly lost all my influence over Eveleen, perhaps you, her friend, her confidante, may still possess it. This strange, cold indecision maddens me. I cannot endure it much longer. Let me, at least, hear through your medium what is to be the recompense of my deep and uncompromising affection.”

Adela, who had hitherto been standing a few paces apart, on hearing this appeal, moved to my

side, and was about to speak, when the shrill voice of Lady Flora, evidently approaching the lodge, was distinctly audible. I rushed from the clasp of Devereux. "Fly!" I cried impetuously; "I am lost if she discovers you—"

"What have you to fear, Eveleen?" he asked sadly, and almost reproachfully; "none here know me, save yourself."

"Nevertheless I beseech you to be gone. My agitation will betray me.—Farewell. Do not doubt my affection. The grave would be more welcome to me than another engagement. Calculate fearlessly upon my constancy—upon my truth. I will be only yours—but fly—leave me—leave me, or I shall die upon the spot."

"Alas, Eveleen; this weakness gives but poor earnest of the future!"

"Devereux, I implore you to be gone, or you will be my ruin."

"Farewell then, since such is indeed your will. All uncertainty is now over for me. I am to be the sacrifice of a childish terror. Heaven bless you, Eveleen! You are yet young. You will soon love again. May he who wins you cherish you as fondly as he whom you discard!"

He was about to turn away, when Adela held him back.

"It is too late;" she said calmly; "you have

been seen, and your retreat at this moment would be even more suspicious than your presence."

"Alas! alas!" I gasped out, as I wrung my hands in agony. "What is to be done? We are both lost."

My sister smiled. "You need not feign indisposition, Eveleen; you are safe, for you have no part to play. You, sir, will perhaps have the kindness to assist me in supporting her. The drama will suffice for the audience."

Devereux had scarcely extended his arms to sustain my trembling frame, and began to murmur his reproachful tenderness into my ear, when Adele called loudly upon Lady Flora to hasten her approach with Bottlemore, who was following close behind her. They had no sooner joined the group than my sister turned with a civil curtsey to Devereux, and, thanking him for his timely aid, dismissed him. I gave one last look in the direction which he had taken, and saw him disappear behind the scaffolding of the lodge.

Once assured that he was indeed gone, I ceased to struggle with the weakness which had overcome me. I closed my eyes and fainted.

CHAPTER X.

When I recovered from my swoon, I found myself stretched upon my bed, and Joséphine busily employed in laving my temples with Hungary water. I looked anxiously for my sister, but she was not beside me.

“ *Mademoiselle Adèle s’est retirée depuis un moment ;*” said my attendant, without subjecting me to the exertion of an inquiry. I was relieved by her consideration, and once more closing my eyes, I fell into one of those dreamy reveries which partake both of waking thought and sleeping uncertainty ; where the soul and the fancy appear to have disenthralled themselves in some degree from the weight of reality and life ; and yet not to have altogether freed their wings from the clogging soil of mortality. The scene of the wood lodge passed circumstantially before me. I verily believe that I heard in my heart the echo of every sentence that had been spoken, as accurately as it was originally

uttered ; yet, nevertheless, I doubted whether I dreamt, or merely obeyed the prompting of a tenacious memory. I had moreover no sensation of regret or of satisfaction : no emotion whatever was excited within me. A soothing and placid calm cradled me, as the mother's arm cradles her slumbering babe. It was a strange — almost a supernatural species of enjoyment, an atmosphere of etherialism, on which I appeared to float without any volition of my own. It was a state sweeter than sleep, because I was conscious of existence ; more delicious than waking, because no painful feeling troubled my visions. It was a twilight of the spirit, which, like that of nature, softened and toned down every salient and rugged object, and invested all about me in the sweet and vapoury shadows which lend a mysterious charm to all upon which they rest.

But this intermedial state of being (if such an expression may be permitted to me) could not endure for ever, arising as it undoubtedly did from the shock which had been given to my nerves, and the long and heavy faint from which I was only slowly awakening. I became gradually conscious of violent suffering in my head. The pulses in my temples beat strong and hard, and the pulsations of my heart were quick and painful. The vapours were passing from my brain, and, as they rolled

away, the sensation of mental as well as bodily uneasiness came back upon me. Again the meeting of the morning rose full upon my memory, but now it brought bitterness, regret, and self-reproach along with it. I felt humbled in my own eyes.

I was aware that I had acted weakly and unworthily. How had I met Devereux?—how had I parted from him? Like a peevish child, incapable of acting from either motive or principle. What must he think of me?—I, who had unhesitatingly poured out on paper all the romantic feelings of devotion and constancy which his anxious attachment had exacted—who had pledged myself to make all things yield to my love for him—who, in the security of my chamber, had defied fate and authority for his sake with passionate vehemence; and from whom he had thus acquired the right to expect at least exertion and consistency? I shuddered as my reason taught me that it could be only with contempt! Once before had we been separated under circumstances which had crushed my pride into the dust, but that had been through the agency of another; and even had I shown weakness then, my age would have excused it. It was too plain; I had no strength of character. Adela had read me rightly. With all my haughty and despotic self-will in small things—with all my self-value and presumption, I was utterly powerless

at every important crisis. Rushing recklessly upon difficulties, I wanted energy to combat the phantoms which, through my own imprudence, I had evoked.

I felt crushed and miserable under the burthen of my own reflections. I wanted help even to think ; and I passed a wretched night, throughout which I never closed my eyes, even for an instant. I no longer understood my own position. Had Devereux considered our separation as a final one, or did he still look upon me as his affianced wife ? This was a question which I was utterly unable to answer ; nor could I comprehend how it might be solved, for I remembered that he had told me not to expect to hear from him, and warned me to desist from attempting a correspondence by which we should probably both be compromised. Thus every avenue of communication between us was closed, and that at a moment when my peace of mind depended upon an exact understanding of our relative position towards each other. And upon what could I cast the blame of this undignified dilemma ? Solely and utterly upon my own weakness and want of self-government. In short, view the matter as I might, the whole evil had originated in myself.

I soon convinced my fears that Devereux's affection was irrecoverably lost to me, while his claim upon my honour remained in full force ; and I need

scarcely confess, that I believed my love for him at that moment to be more powerful than ever. I pined for daylight. I had now no hope, save in Adela. Yes—my spirit was humbled even to this ! Once my thoughts turned towards Lady O'Halloran; but I felt relieved when I remembered that she had been absent in town for several weeks; for how could I have rallied my courage sufficiently to tell her such a tale? No—Adela was my only resource; and to her I should be spared the mortification of detailing the cause of my embarrassment.

I anticipated from my sister an early visit in my chamber on the morrow; but when that morrow came, it brought only a civil inquiry through her maid, to which I replied as briefly as it had been made. Nevertheless, I continued anxiously awaiting her appearance for several hours in vain; when, satisfied that she purposely avoided me, I became more restless and apprehensive than before, and could endure this additional suspense no longer.

Summoning Joséphine, I made a hasty toilette; and, near its close, had the satisfaction of seeing Adela in the grounds, making her way towards the wood which belted one side of the home-park. I threw on my bonnet and shawl in an instant, and started in pursuit. She had evidently not remarked my approach; and when I reached her, she was sitting upon the mossy turf at the foot of a beech-

tree, not occupied with a book, as was her usual habit; but with her face buried in her hands, and lost in a train of deep thought. She started as I paused, panting and breathless, beside her; and as she raised her head, I remarked that two large tears were resting on her cheeks.

“ I have been anxiously expecting you all the morning in my room, Adela;” I said, as I cast myself down beside her; “ but at last I began to fear that you were purposely avoiding me.”

“ Your fears were correct,” she replied coldly.

“ And wherefore?” I asked earnestly; “ surely you have a thousand things to say to me?”

“ You are wrong—I have nothing to say.”

“ Have you, then, already forgotten the scene of yesterday?”

“ By no means. You unexpectedly had an interview with your noble-hearted lover, whose attachment is worthy of any sacrifice, however great. You declined to make any—even the most trifling. He left you with a bruised spirit and a wounded heart. Surely there could be no occasion for me to repeat to you circumstances of which you are so well aware as these.”

“ At least,” I said sadly, “ you might pity me for having given him this pain.”

“ What obliged you to do so?”

“ Reason and prudence.”

“ Rather confess that your love for him is not sufficiently great to induce you to run a paltry risk in order to secure it. Your lips would never have hesitated to utter the vow which he claimed from you, had it been written in your heart.”

“ Do you, then, blame me for having refused to ratify our engagement ? ”

“ Blame you ! ” echoed my sister, turning her eyes, which were flashing with disdain, full upon me ; “ quite the contrary. I applaud you for having been just to yourself. A feeble nature should at once, as yours did, yield to events without a struggle, and not venture to encounter trials to which it is unequal.”

“ Adela ; ” I said bitterly, piqued by her uncompromising frankness ; “ we should all wait until we are tried, and prove our own strength before we scoff at the weakness of others. Opportunities to do so, I should imagine, are never wanting long to any one, and even the firmest will may be dompted. Wait until our mother interferes with your own views, and presses upon you a marriage for which you have no inclination.”

“ If I love elsewhere—above all, if I am so happy as to be beloved,” she answered calmly, “ all her interference and all her efforts will be vain. I have already told you this.”

“ I fancied so myself ; but I have discovered my

error. As regards your own declaration, I put no faith in it at the time ; nor do I now."

" You are wrong. You should not judge of my character by your own. The difference of our education has necessarily influenced our modes of thinking and feeling. Brought up in the arms of those to whom you owe your being, the first sentiments of your heart must have been those of tenderness and submission ; you instinctively learned to love and to respect an authority to which you were indebted both for security and comfort. Things have changed. The yoke has become more heavy and more irksome ; but the fetters of habit are upon you, and you do not retain even the will to shake them off. My case is wholly dissimilar. The outcast child of an unloving mother, I no sooner became capable of appreciating my position, than I wept over myself. Tears were the luxury of my early girlhood ; of those hours when I was dismissed to my sports. I grew up on tears ; until I ventured to ask myself by what right and upon what pretext I was thus flung off ! You may believe that I could discover no plea which sufficed to satisfy my reason ; and I then made it the one great moral business of my life to weigh every detail connected with my misfortune. Under this mental discipline, both my heart and my character have been educated. I trust to be able some day to

prove that I have been just alike to my mother and to myself. I have now clearly defined the bounds within which to admit her authority as legitimate ; and beyond those I will not yield even a hair's breadth. Judge, then, what prospect there is of her being able to influence me in the most important decision of my life."

"And can you really have come to such a resolution before you are quite sixteen years of age?"

Adela shrugged her shoulders with a contemptuous smile, but made no reply.

"I cannot boast of the same moral independence;" I pursued after a moment's silence; "and I seriously require your advice."

"My advice? *A quoi bon?*"

"That it may guide and strengthen me."

My sister laughed. There was a mockery in her laughter at times that made my blood leap in my veins; it did so now.—"You are merry;" I remarked with asperity; "I asked counsel, not contempt."

"I have no advice to offer. Counsel to you would be merely a verbal improvidence."

"Why so?"

"Because you would be, in all probability, afraid to follow it."

"Then, were it your case, you would risk everything to keep your faith?"

“Never mind me. I am in no way connected with the business. But are you so sure that the climax of the adventure is still dependent upon yourself?”

“Surely you do not imagine that Devereux will consider our parting of yesterday as a final one?”

“I imagine nothing. It is certain that he had previously exhibited a rare degree of patience.”

“I should be wretched!” I exclaimed, as my tears fell hot and fast — “I should be miserable were he now to abandon me. I have never loved him so perfectly as within the last few hours.”

“That is unfortunate;” said Adela, perfectly unmoved by this sudden burst of feeling; “very unfortunate; but quite in rule. You were certainly destined from your cradle, Eveleen, to be a heroine; and no heroine can expect to pass through life without many sharp trials.”

“And is this all the consolation which you are able to give me?”

“I consider that there can be none greater. You are already on the stage, and will ere long have the world as your spectator; for you may remember that Mr. Devereux asserted the probability of your soon being withdrawn from Rooksley.”

“What will the world be to me?” I asked, as I wiped away another burst of tears. “He will be absent whom alone I shall care to please.”

Adela sprang to her feet, and drew her shawl closer about her : " I will continue my walk ;" she said with a suppressed gesture of weariness ; " for you will, I doubt not, find your own thoughts more agreeable society than myself."

I did not seek to detain or to accompany her. I was more irresolute, more depressed than ever ; the last straw at which I grasped had floated beyond my reach, and I had no longer any hope of help save in my own firmness. My own firmness ! The conviction was an epigram, and a bitter one, upon myself ; and the tears that I shed for the next half hour, and which I believed were given to Devereux, were in a great degree wrung from me by mortification and disappointment.

I was aroused from my fit of weeping by the sound of the warning bell from the upper lodge, which betokened the arrival of visitors ; but I remained passively beneath my beech-tree. I knew of none that were likely to interest me ; and I therefore left, as I generally did, their identity to chance. The year of weeds had expired. My seventeenth birthday was over. My mother had not written to congratulate me ; nor, perhaps, all circumstances considered, could she be fairly expected to do so. Of her arrival at Rooksley, I, however, could not dream for a moment, as her last letter from Lady Devereux's, not yet of quite six

weeks' date, had mentioned no such intention ; and I was in no mood at that moment to be troubled by the appearance of any other person upon earth. Gradually I fell back into the same uneasy train of thought which had before absorbed me, and forgot the interruption altogether. At times a glow of resolution gave me momentary strength, and I resolved to neglect the warning of Devereux, and to write to Dublin, to entreat him to forgive the weakness which must so deeply have wounded his affection ; and as I sat there, full of this courageous project, I framed a letter full of pathos and devotion, of which the effect could not have failed to prove all I wished ; but then rose before me the memory of my mother, and I shrank affrighted from the audacity of my dream ; and if, during my paroxysm of valour, the blood had burned upon my brow, so, on the reaction of thought, I shivered with the chill of one who had suddenly been immersed in water.

The recall-bell, which summoned stragglers in the grounds to the house, at length rang ; and very reluctantly I rose to receive the importunate guest, whomsoever it might prove. I saw nothing of Adela in my way, and at once proceeded to the drawing-room. A footman, who was stationed at the door, threw it back ere I could utter an inquiry, and announced me ; when, to my astonish-

ment, I found myself in the presence of my mother and Sir James Dornton. For an instant, I doubted the evidence of my senses. It seemed but a few weeks since I had parted from Lady Madelaine, veiled in crape, and enveloped in close and heavy drapery; and now she stood before me, still indeed in black, but attired with an elegance and a research which told no tale of mourning. She was in high beauty, and bathed in smiles. After having touched my forehead with her lips, she turned to her companion, and said, gaily—
“Will you stroll about the Park for half an hour, Sir James, after you have shaken hands with Eveleen? I have a thousand things to say to her; but I will promise that they shall all be said so briefly, that your patience and gallantry will not be overtaxed.”

The gentleman bowed obediently; took my hand, which he raised gallantly to his lips, and then, seizing his hat, passed out through the conservatory.

“How earnestly you examine me, Eveleen!” laughed Lady Madelaine. “Am I looking unusually handsome, or unusually plain, that I thus rivet your attention?”

“Beautiful! resplendent!” I replied instinctively.
“I never before saw you so beautiful.”

“Then you would not feel much surprise were

you to hear that I had already been importuned to take another name?"

"By no means;" I said gravely, recovering from my first emotion of surprise and admiration, and falling back upon my own bitter feelings. "There are doubtlessly many who would gladly induce you to do so; my astonishment would be only at their success."

"And may I venture to ask wherefore?" demanded Lady Madelaine coldly, as a cloud gathered on her brow; "does the name of Tilden appear to you to be so distinguished that it could not be worthily replaced? In that case, the Lady Madelaine Glenfillan, who never ought to have borne it, would indeed, in your eyes, commit a heinous offence by assuming another which she might herself consider to be better suited to her birth and rank."

I thought of my father; my heart swelled with indignation; I could not utter a syllable.

"Explain yourself, I entreat, Miss Tilden;" continued my mother, more and more irritated. "I understand perfectly from your manner that there is an *arrière pensée*, and I request that you will express it."

"I would rather avoid a subject which appears to anger your ladyship."

"Anger me! You mistake. This is a matter

of feeling, not of temper. Let us understand each other."

"Then, madam, since you press me to speak, I confess I had believed that, free to act as you please, affluent, and with two daughters of an age to be companions to you——."

"I comprehend you perfectly ;" interposed Lady Madelaine with impatience. "You have some idea of reading me a lecture. Do not deny yourself the gratification. Proceed, and tell me that at the age of thirty-five I ought to devote myself entirely to my children ; and renounce, for their sakes, my tastes, my influence, and all the pleasures in which they cannot share."

"Believe me," I said composedly, "that I never imagined such an event possible ; nor did I ever feel selfish enough to wish it. It was contrary to my inclination that I was urged to make any comment upon your actions. I am quite aware that you are at liberty to please yourself in all things, and that my sister and myself have only to respect your will."

"I am of the same opinion ;" was the dry rejoinder of Lady Madelaine ; "and consequently expect that such will be the spirit in which you will receive the tidings of my approaching marriage with Lord Otterford."

"With Lord Otterford !" I echoed in violent emotion, as I sprang from my chair.

“Even so, Miss Tilden;” replied my mother, while a flush passed over her face; “have you anything to object to such an arrangement?”

I was silent. My heart was wrung. I remembered past scenes—I remembered Emily Vernon, and my father, and the meeting in the octagon room—I was spirit-sick. I am afraid that, at that moment, even ignorant as I was of the extent of her weakness, I despised my mother.

“As I appear to have nothing to expect, either from your duty or your affection at so critical a moment, Miss Tilden,” said Lady Madelaine harshly, as she also rose, “I will detain you no longer than to request that you will inform your sister of my intended marriage. I shall dispense with her presence, as I have no wish to expose myself to a second insult.”

I required no further bidding; but, with a silent curtsy, hastened to profit by my dismissal. I had scarcely reached my own room, when I heard the recall-bell summon the baronet from his walk. and a quarter of an hour afterwards the carriage drove off. The whole affair had been, to say the least, singularly conducted. It was evident that my mother had not even seen Lady Flora; she had specifically declined to see Adela; she had travelled a long distance—scarcely remained an hour in the house—and left without taking the

slightest refreshment. And again — why should she come accompanied by Sir James Dorn-ton? It is true, that he was an old friend of the family; but had she not her still older and *female* friend, Lady Devereux, who would have seemed to be a more fitting companion for so long a drive? Or even Lord Otterford himself, so soon to be her husband, and who might necessarily be supposed eager to conciliate her daughters by so simple an act of courtesy? The more I reflected, the more my astonishment increased. The cool and unhesitating manner in which Lady Madelaine had given her companion to understand that his absence was desired on my entrance, and the passive acquiescence which had followed on his side, showed also a familiarity which I could by no means explain to myself, particularly under my mother's present circumstances. My own pale and depressed appearance, which, on another occasion, would not have escaped comment, and probably reproof, had not elicited a remark, although it was too visible to remain unperceived. The whole thing was an enigma.

Nevertheless, I soon turned from this subject of marvel to the still greater one of Lady Madelaine's marriage. The arts of the "Circe" had then prevailed! I had not yet learned to remember the spell of wealth. I was now eager to communicate

the astounding news to Adela, and I sought her first in her own chamber ; but, not finding her there, I descended to the drawing-room, where she was sitting, still folded in her shawl, and so buried in thought that she was not conscious of my presence until I spoke. The tears were yet trickling slowly down my cheeks, while those of my sister were suffused with so bright a bloom that she looked positively handsome.

“ Not yet consoled, Eveleen ?” she asked, with a smile : “ what said our lady-mother to your grief ?”

“ It is she who is cause that I weep ;” I answered, as I flung myself down on the sofa beside her. “ Prepare yourself for strange news, Adela. Her term of mourning is over. Our poor father is already forgotten. She is about to become once more a bride.”

“ Do you consider that so strange ?” she asked coldly ; “ I have been prepared for such an event for months. You might have guessed that this would be the case when our mother left Rooksley, and that we were not her companions.”

“ To marry again !” I repeated not having yet conquered my consternation ; “ with two daughters of an age to be established, who require to be produced in the world, to be suitably introduced, and to be no longer treated as children. I flattered

myself that in this instance, at least, she would not have failed."

"You are to be pitied for having encouraged such a delusion;" interposed my sister; "as for me, I am no day-dreamer—I find the realities of life suffice. Little care I how Lady Madelaine may dispose of herself—whether she marry again, or remain a widow."

"But do you not dread the idea of a father-in-law?"

"I never took fright at a name. If he be amiable, courteous, and kind-hearted, he may be of service to me; if the contrary, I have little to fear from him."

She sank again into silence, and soon became once more absorbed in thought. I observed her narrowly, but her indifference was evidently genuine. I almost envied her impassibility.

"Have you then no curiosity to learn the actual name of this new bridegroom?" I asked.

"So little, that I should suffer nothing by waiting until it is officially announced."

"Nevertheless," I persisted, "you cannot fail to be surprised when I tell you that it is Lord Otterford."

"Lord Otterford! Indeed. I congratulate you. His marriage with the mother will probably be

succeeded by that of his nephew with the daughter. The drama will prove a comedy after all."

"Adela, this is cruel. You know too well how we parted."

"You will meet again."

"How? Where?"

"In any way—every where—nothing is impossible to a determined spirit and a devoted heart."

"Alas! I have no hope. I dare not anticipate happiness to myself from this incomprehensible marriage."

"Anything but incomprehensible in my opinion;" said my sister with her usual phlegm; "that Lady Madelaine should so soon have consented to resign her liberty may astonish those who do not comprehend her; but there the marvel ceases. It is the rank of her new suitor which has determined her. Nothing can be more natural, or more consistent with her general character; nor do I impute it to her as a crime; an elevated station was her birthright; and it is a prejudice which claims respect, and is, by no means, without foundation."

"But tell me seriously, I beseech of you;" I said after a pause; "do you believe that Devereux will resent my indecision of yesterday?"

"The last time we spoke together upon this

subject you appeared confident of your power ; why do you now suppose it to be weakened ?”

“ I cannot tell, but the more desirable our union appears, the less reliance do I feel on my influence over his heart.”

“ And does it now appear more desirable than when, with all the ardour of an earnest and honest affection, he was, only a few short hours ago, urging you to unite your fate with his ?”

“ It does, because I have since reflected deeply. I have revolved all the circumstances in my mind, and I cannot perceive one which should be adverse to us. Devereux is well-born—he is the nephew of my mother’s intended husband—independent in his means, handsome in his person, high-bred in his manners. Surely that mother can have no ambition beyond such a son-in-law.”

“ It is, nevertheless, possible that she may have other views for you. But were you really to marry Mr. Devereux, are you quite assured that you should love him ?”

“ What a question ! He is charming ! I should adore him—”

“ And if your love were not returned ?”

“ My love not returned ! I have no fear that such could be the case. I am now a thousand times more beautiful than when he saw me first.”

“ I admit the fact ; but if, meanwhile, he should have formed another attachment ?”

“ I will win him back.”

“ You may not succeed.”

“ I have no fear of failure. This, moreover, is a risk which I must run in common with a thousand other women who are envied by half the world. The essentials of happiness would still remain ; affluence, a handsome establishment, agreeable society, freedom of action, and a good position ; with all these there can be little to apprehend.”

“ I disagree with you entirely ;” said Adela earnestly ; “ all these things are desirable, it is true ; but it would require far more to make me happy. I must love, and be loved, fondly and exclusively ; and did the greatest and most powerful noble of the land offer me a coronet upon any other terms, I would reject it, for it would only burn into my brow.”

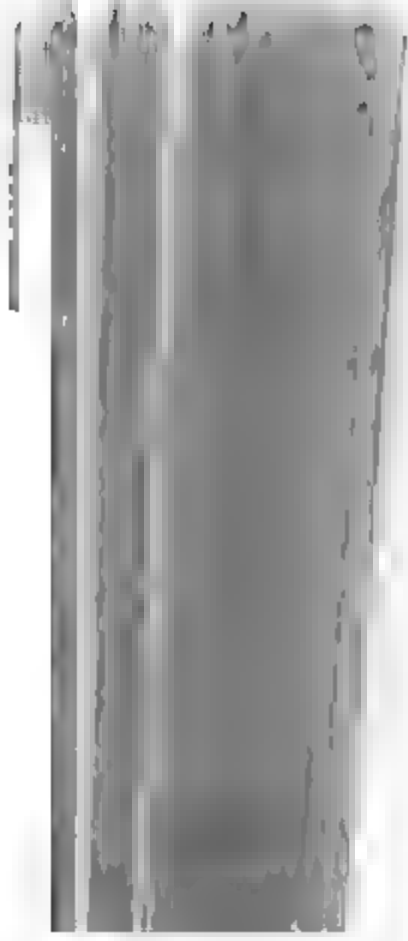
“ And you talk of my romance, Adela ! Who is rational and reasonable now ?”

“ Time will show ;” said my sister ; “ and, in the mean time, I hear the dressing-bell.”

CHAPTER XI.

My mother was married in the eighteenth month of her widowhood. The event was duly announced by letter at Rooksley ; and was accompanied by two costly ornaments, as bridal gifts to Adela and myself ; but of any regret that we were not present at the ceremony, or of any wish to see us in town, we received not a word. I had so thoroughly persuaded myself that my mother's union with Lord Otterford must necessarily involve my own introduction, and subsequent marriage with his nephew, that my health and spirits both failed beneath the disappointment ; and the rather that I had heard nothing of Devereux from the morning on which we parted at the lodge.

From my sister I received no consolation. She affected rather to pity than to blame my weakness ; and did not hesitate to affirm that I was destined to be a puppet worked by the wires of others, and certain to destroy my own happiness without either



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belief that no innocent beauty of seventeen had ever been injured like myself by an inconstant lover. Could Devereux have seen me daily haunting the borders of the lake, and looking (in vain) into the hollow trunk of the old willow which had formerly served as our *bureau de poste*, he must at once have been at my feet. But, alas ! I wandered, and wept, and nursed myself into a conviction that my only hope of happiness was centred in his affection, totally in vain. Not a sign of remembrance could I meet in any direction. It was too true—Adela was a prophet—he had forgotten me !

From this morbid state of feeling I was aroused by a letter from my mother. Lord Otterford and herself had just returned from Rome, where they had spent six weeks. It sounded classical and correct, and they both piqued themselves upon their *savoir vivre* ; therefore they went to Rome to look at each other, and to have their proceedings duly set forth in the public journals. In this letter I was desired to prepare myself for an early removal to town ; but, save a cold remembrance, there was no mention made of Adela. It was evident that we were to be separated. Lady Madelaine was too thoroughly a woman of fashion to risk a third petticoat in her opera-box, or a second daughter in her morning-room. *Il ne faut jamais afficher ses malheurs*—at

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to induce me to resign his affection? Oh! no, no! where you have learnt the bitter lesson is your own secret; but you assuredly know the human heart too well to have imagined that such were the opiates by which it might be laid at rest. I do not even ask you why you have so strangely responded to my frankness, when I bared my whole spirit before you, and asked for sisterly counsel; suffice it, that you have driven the arrow home. I can never again love a human being as I now love Devereux."

I spoke energetically and rapidly; and, as I paused, I looked towards my sister. Never did I witness a change so sudden and so complete—cheek, brow, and bosom, were one blush; her eyes flashed—her bosom heaved—she gasped for breath. "What means this, Adela?" I asked, completely awe-struck.

"It is rather I who should put the question;" she replied, commanding her emotion by a powerful effort: "how can it affect *me*, that you should love, or not love, Mr. Devereux?"

"We are a mutual enigma," I remarked, greatly offended.

"By no means;" was the ready retort—"you have long ceased to be one to me; but I pray you, act as you may, not to transfer the responsibility of your proceedings to my influence. Leave me, at least, at peace in my solitude."



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bridehood; and I am to

pleasure than to forget my existence until I myself remind her of it. You and I require different handling, Eveleen ; she may find amusement in startling the leaves of the sensitive plant, but can derive small entertainment in seeking to crush those of the nettle."

A fortnight after this conversation I was in London. The improvement which had taken place in my appearance made my *débüt* a triumph, and even elicited the congratulations of Lady Madelaine. I was no longer the precocious child of whom the Rooksley guests had made a plaything. My person and mind had both become matured, and I took my place at once in my mother's circle, with a composure and an *à plomb* which removed all awkwardness, and taught those around me to forget that I was a novice in the world and the world's ways. Lord Otterford was evidently delighted at my success, and I fondly flattered myself that he was exulting in the beauty and fashion of his nephew's bride. He was the most gallant of husbands and fathers-in-law. Raised to affluence from comparatively straightened means, by the noble income of his wife, he saw all *en beau*, and still played the lover so admirably, that it was easy to divine the gratification of both heart and vanity enjoyed by Lady Madelaine. Secure of the only man whom she had ever, in all probability, really loved, my

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guished persons in the realm ; and, in short, to so glorious a pinnacle had royal favour exalted us, that it was ere long decided that Lady Madelaine, in marrying Lord Otterford, had rather consulted the interests of her beautiful daughter than her own inclination. It was so necessary that Miss Tilden should have a privileged protector. It was so considerate and delicate in Lady Madelaine.

Kind and ever charitable world. It is always ready to stretch forth a helping hand to those who desire to receive it empty !

But where, amid the crowd who thronged my path, was Herbert Devereux ? Of my mother I dared not make the inquiry ; but, although I had not heard a word from him since we parted, I was aware that he was no longer in Ireland, many of his brother-officers being at that moment on our visiting-list. Three months elapsed, and still I looked in vain for his appearance. I wrote incessantly to Adela, to whom I poured out the full tide of my disappointment and perplexity. Need I say that I also imparted to her my inflexible resolution to remain faithful to him to the last ? I reminded her that I was at length emancipated, that I had taken a definite position, that my claim to do so was tacitly admitted ; and that, consequently, I must and would sustain in this, the most interesting circumstance of my life, at once my own principles, and the plighted word which I had freely given.

The replies which I received to these lengthy epistles were universally brief, ambiguous, and unsatisfactory. They contained neither congratulation nor warning. Adela still affected to believe that I was incapable of a deep and lasting affection ; and, passing slightly over the passages which related to Devereux, appeared more interested in ascertaining the names and pretensions of my new suitors. The most assiduous of these was Sir James Dornton ; but, as I never looked upon him in any other light than as an old admirer of my mother's, I did not include him in the catalogue ; and the rather, as, presuming upon old acquaintanceship, I attached no consequence whatever to the complaisance with which he resigned himself to all my caprices.

Occasionally, when the memory of Devereux rose up vividly before me, I felt indignant at the persevering attentions of the patient baronet ; and treated him with a cold and haughty formality which would have acted as a final dismissal to most men, although it produced no effect whatever upon Sir James. He was just as gay, just as witty, and just as maliciously at ease when I affected a repugnance towards him, as when I showed amusement at his sallies. To my mother he had suddenly become absolutely essential. No project of any description was finally decided before it had been discussed with Dornton. Nothing could ex-

ceed his intimacy with Lord Otterford, or his favour with Lady Madelaine. One complaint of my discourtesy towards him would have involved me with both ; but that word was never uttered. He appeared tacitly to admit my right of acting as I saw fit, and never evidenced the least consciousness of my change of mood or manner. That he was perfectly heartless I soon convinced myself, and the natural result followed. My vanity was flattered by the devotion of a man of taste and fashion, whose admiration added to my consequence ; and whose feelings were, as I firmly believed, quite beyond the reach of injury ; cheerful and buoyant in disposition, the varied, ingenious, and witty sallies of the baronet first amused me, then attracted me, and finally I began to miss them during his absence, and to recall them for my own gratification. This fact had, nevertheless, no effect upon my heart. Devereux was still its hidden idol. I even wept at times in solitude over the mystery in which he had enshrouded himself. Not once had his name been uttered in my presence, although Lady Devereux was a frequent guest in Grosvenor Square ; and never failed to overwhelm me with attentions and professions of regard. At length I could endure this state of suspense no longer ; and chancing one morning to find Lord Otterford alone in the library, I resolved to compel

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“ Endeavour myself to make him forget me !” I exclaimed indignantly ; “ that will I never do. Our attachment is reciprocal. We have vowed ourselves to each other. We have no other hope of happiness.”

“ Charming conclusion !” smiled my auditor ; “ and upon what premises do you base such an opinion ? Is it upon the strength of Devereux’s character ? upon his estimable qualities ? upon his constancy, and the fervour of his affection ? Do not deceive yourself, my dear girl ; you know nothing about these. I do not intend to deny him the possession of every virtue with which you have generously invested him. I am not Jesuit enough to probe a young man’s spirit ; but let me ask you if you have discovered in him what is much more perceptible—an uncompromising delicacy, an exacting uprightness, and a susceptibility of temperament very ill calculated to ensure the happiness of a handsome and fashionable woman ? Are you aware that he never forgets an action or a word by which his feelings have been wounded ?—that he never condescends to reproach, or to complain ?—and that he perhaps suffers mortally at the very moment when a superficial observer would believe him to be perfectly calm ? Have you made this discovery, and then asked yourself how these tenacious qualities would act upon so volatile a nature as your own ?”

“ No, my lord ;” I answered angrily ; “ I have entered into no such speculations ; and I cannot but express my astonishment that you should appear so pre-disposed against an alliance which I should have thought might be considered as both honourable and eligible for your nephew.”

“ There can be no doubt that it would be both ;” was the calm reply ; “ but I was discussing *your* prospect of happiness, Miss Tilden, not the interests of Mr. Devereux. I avow frankly that an union between yourself and Herbert would have been a great gratification to me personally ; and the rather that, although not blind to his faults, I believe him to be possessed of many high and noble qualities ; but, having been made aware that it can never take place, I now consider it my duty to discourage it to the extent of my power.”

I rose proudly from my seat, saying as I did so : “ I thank you, my lord, for your candour ; and I now comprehend my position. Lady Madelaine Otterford has a personal interest in separating us, and you are influenced by her objection. Mr. Devereux and myself have therefore no help to hope from either. Be it so. We are now, at least, both old enough to be aware that we are not to be victimized by the tyranny of our relations, and disposed of like merchandize, without the assent of our own free will. Surely we are not to be denied the control of our future fate ?”

“ You must excuse my terminating the conversation ;” said Lord Otterford, as he also rose ; “ I am in a peculiar and difficult position as regards this affair. I have already heard too much. I pray you spare me all further discussion. If I can be of service on any other subject—and surely your thousand and one adorers must occasionally cost you some perplexity—command me without scruple :” and he extended his hand half laughingly.

The taunt awoke me to a desire of vengeance. “ One moment more, my lord ;” I said, as I laid my hand in his ; “ there is yet another exile, both from sight and remembrance, for whom I would inquire — Miss Vernon — poor Emily — what of her ?”

I felt the fingers tremble which were clasped about my own ; and as I looked steadily at my companion I saw his cheek blench, and his lip quiver ; he rallied, however, by a strong effort, and answered with affected indifference ;

“ Poor Miss Vernon ! You have not forgotten her then ? She was a sweet rose, with a canker at the core. She has been long suffering, but her sorrows will soon be over ; her brother writes word that she will not live to leave Naples.”

“ The faculty call it consumption, doubtless,” I whispered through my tears.

“ They do. Hopeless consumption.”

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“ I infer nothing. I speak frankly and fearlessly. What should I fear ? Do we not read each other’s hearts ? What a cheat is human life ! A pale brow droops, a bright eye grows dim, a young heart breaks slowly and silently, and then physicians are called in to give the disease a name ; the learned men know nothing of the antecedents ; the patient does not confide to them all the detail of the past ; not a syllable is breathed of the simulated passion which awoke happiness and hope—not a word is murmured of the falsehood which left its venom to fester in the heart,—and so they throng around the bed ; and while the mother listens through her tears for one cheering prophecy, and the brother turns away too proud to betray his agony, they mock the victim, whose only cure must be the grave, with scientific subtleties and idle logic. And then come the hearse, and the bed of earth—and the drama is played out, and the curtain falls. Is it not so, my lord ? ”

Long before I ceased speaking Otterford had sunk again into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. I stood for a moment looking upon him in silence ; but he attempted no reply ; and after a while, I turned slowly away and left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

A few weeks after this interview London began to thin rapidly. The season was nearly at an end, and the court had removed to Windsor. To Lady Madelaine, Rooksley was, of course, out of the question ; and we accordingly removed to Woodville, a hunting-seat on the border of the New Forest, belonging to Lord Otterford ; and which he had, since his marriage, caused to be enlarged and beautified. To me the place was positive enchantment ; and I should, had I been happy, have required no other source of amusement than that which was afforded by the features of a country so novel and picturesque ; my mother, however, professed no taste for country pleasures ; and, accordingly, we were speedily followed by a score of her *habitués*, among the earliest of whom was Sir James Dornton. Assuredly, his social talents were universal. He was as gay, as thoroughly at home, and as constantly occupied at Woodville, as amid the busy crowds of

the metropolis. No *ennui* could successfully contend against his unvarying spirits. Every day he contrived to discover some new object of interest or amusement. He was a perfect wizard. His influence gladdened our whole circle; but in all his exertions I could not fail to remark that it was my peculiar gratification which he the most zealously sought to ensure. In my cause he was indefatigable; and, what was still more welcome, never intrusive. Not a word of love—not a gesture of preference escaped him. His tact was admirable. My mother was loud in his praise when he chanced to be absent; and never lost an opportunity of encouraging his attention to myself; appearing even to forget that he had once worshipped at her own shrine.

The idle, pleasure-seeking life which we led in the country favoured this species of chivalric devotion, which affects to expect no return save the enjoyment of the passing hour. Lord Otterford had placed himself at the feet of Mrs. Trevyllian, a faded beauty, who was too indolent to be exacting, and too uninteresting to disturb the peace of Lady Madelaine; and she, in her turn, had passively suffered herself to become the momentary idol of the Marquis of Chaffington, a noble fopling, with light curling hair and delicately small hands, good-tempered, popular, and inoffensive. All the young ladies pronounced him charming; but this was a

mistake. He was like a handsome piece of wax-work, pleasant enough to look at, though it required the best will in the world, after the first five minutes, to enable you to find patience to listen to him. He talked, moreover, incessantly, and was tolerably happy in the choice of his subjects ; but he overwhelmed you with a perfect cataclysm of words, weak, watery, and wearisome.

I sought in vain to effect an intimacy with Lady Devereux ; she had replaced her lord, who spent the whole of his time in the forest among game-keepers and rangers, by a worthy old general, whose undisguised admiration of her waning attractions made her feel once more young. In short, with the exception of half-a-dozen insipid pretenders to my own hand, who had contrived to get themselves invited for short periods to Woodville, I found only Sir James Dorn-ton sufficiently unoccupied to command leisure to entertain me. When we rode out, he was always beside me ; and, as he was familiar with all the byroads through the forest, he was our guide, and left no object of interest unseen or unexplained. The small difficulties which occasionally presented themselves in these expeditions were always converted into matter of mirth by his untiring pleasantry ; in short, he appeared to have totally laid aside the hyper-fastidiousness by which he was generally distinguished, in order to make us

fully conscious that we could scarcely dispense with his society.

Finding that he evinced no intention of profiting by the numerous opportunities thus afforded to him of persecuting me with his addresses, I became less reserved in my turn, and no longer feigned insensibility to his wit and good humour. The change evidently gratified him ; but I was far from imagining to what extent. Unconscious that he was cognizant of my secret, it had never once occurred to me that he was thus exerting all his powers of pleasing in order to supersede Devereux in my affections ; and that, what was the mere relenting of my dislike, could be misconstrued by him into a symbol of success. Such was the case, however ; and so thoroughly had he contrived to convince himself of the fact, that he at length ventured to approach the subject which I so much dreaded ; yet even then, not as I should have anticipated from a man who could expend enthusiasm even upon trifles, and at times display a depth of feeling which was evidently intuitive and spontaneous. Whenever he talked seriously, or what some would call passionately, to me, it was evident that he laboured to do so gracefully ; that he rounded his periods smoothly ; and seemed almost to seek for phrases which might compensate for the chilling, monotonous, and forced manner in which they were

uttered. I well remember that, in one of my letters to Adela, I told her the pleasant baronet would never win a woman's heart ; for that, although a gay-spirited friend, he made a most drowsy lover, and only helped the cause of the man whom he affected to seek to supersede.

On a glorious evening, near the close of July, I was alone in the stone balcony which extended across the windows of the room in which all our party were assembled. The curtains were drawn, and the sounds of my mother's harp came faintly through their heavy folds. A small stream which had its source in the neighbourhood had been diverted from its original channel, and forced through the pleasure-grounds, and, immediately under the windows, it poured its sparkling waters into a miniature lake bordered with flowering shrubs. The moon was rising, and the stars were walking forth to meet her from every quarter of the firmament ; and as I leant there in silence, dreaming of Devereux, and indulging in a thousand vague and fantastic wishes, I almost unconsciously watched the dazzling reflection of each separate star, as it seemed to spring upward from the depths of the sleeping water, in order to gem its surface into a mimic semblance of the blue sky above it. The softened music from the room, the distant gush and fall of the myriad notes of a nightingale, the luxurious

breathings of the flowers under the languid impulse of the summer wind, the whisperings, mystic and wordless, of the leaves, and the bright hopes which I was building up, all combined to fill my heart with a calm and placid joy to which I had been long a stranger ; nor was I conscious that I wept until a large tear fell upon my hand.

“ What are you thinking of so deeply ? ” murmured a voice close to my ear.

I started, and saw Sir James Dornton at my side.

“ The question is scarcely discreet ; ” I answered with affected gaiety. “ I have not yet adopted a confessor.”

“ You need no such functionary. Should you suppose yourself to be imparting anything secret, if you were to tell me frankly that you were thinking of Herbert Devereux ? ”

“ Decidedly. Had such been the case, and were I to admit it, I should consider that I had transformed you from a friend into a confidant.”

“ Disabuse yourself at once, fair dreamer ; ” was the retort ; “ the image of Devereux never rises up before you ; you never heave a sigh at his remembrance ; nay, you never vaguely recall his memory, that I am not conscious of the fact.”

“ In that case,” I said impatiently, “ I am very likely to consider your presence insupportable.”

“ I apprehend no such injustice on your part. You are too generous to punish me for taking a lively interest in all that affects your happiness.”

“ I am sorry, Sir James,” I replied coldly, “ that you should employ your feelings so unprofitably. If you are really as conversant with my secret sentiments as you appear to imply, you must be well aware that I desire no such demonstrations.”

“ Yet how can it be otherwise, Miss Tilden ! Are all the world to be at liberty to admire, to adore you, and to tell you so, save myself ? Say ‘ Yes,’ if you will, and I must submit to the decree ; but, at least, suffer me to retain the control of my feelings. Do not reduce me to a perfect cipher, simply because I have done you more worthy justice. You are at this moment the victim of a hopeless attachment ; it overshadows the brightness of your spirit, it subdues the buoyancy of your nature : deny it if you can. And do you suppose that I can look upon your suffering coldly ! — that I can abstain from the desire to tear away the veil from that bright spirit, to restore the buoyant elasticity of that pure young heart ? No, no ! you cannot so strangely have mistaken me.”

“ Presuming your inference to be correct, I beg you to believe that when I seek to disenthral myself, I shall be quite equal to the task.”

“ I rejoice to hear it ; for, were it not for the

firm hope of that deliverance, I should become desperate."

"Sir James Dornton! Have you considered your words! Do you remember to whom they are addressed?"

"Perfectly."

"Then, sir, you must concede that they are both ill-judged and ill-timed."

"I will do nothing of the sort; ere long you will be less severe."

"The future must depend upon yourself;" I said haughtily; and lifting one of the curtains, I passed into the room without awaiting his reply.

From that evening I avoided every occasion of meeting him *tête-à-tête*. I could not brook that he should force upon me his advice and his reproaches. I was no longer at ease in his presence. Every word that he uttered, and every look that he turned upon me, seemed to contain an epigram. I would fain have complained of the confidential tone which he had thus suddenly assumed; but to whom could I pour forth my indignation? Lady Madeleine, I well knew, would not listen to any blame of her favourite, nor could I have confided to her my mortification and annoyance, without betraying my continued interest in Devereux. Neither could I appeal to Lord Otterford; for since the conversation which I had recorded, we had never exchanged

a syllable, save in public. There was, consequently, no method of ridding myself of this system of persecution, save by my own firmness; and I resolved to lose no opportunity of convincing Sir James not only of my indifference, for of that I flattered myself he was already well aware, but of the positive dislike which he was rapidly entailing upon himself by his inquisitorial bearing.

Isolated as I was amid a crowd—disappointed day after day in the hope which I had cherished, that Devereux must, sooner or later, join the circle of his uncle's guests—angry with myself for having been so unwarily made the dupe of a man to whom my secret was known, I shunned him with a feeling which soon grew into positive hate; nor was it lessened by the perfect *sang froid* and composure with which he bore every exhibition of my petulance. His quiet and self-satisfied smile never failed to drive the blood to my brow, but I dared not venture upon any decided demonstration of my annoyance. The eye of Lady Madelaine was frequently upon me, and there was a warning in it at those moments, before which I quailed even in the first burst of my indignation. What was I to do? What measures could I adopt, to rid myself of the impassible and pertinacious baronet, who evidently considered me as his own property, and to whom my struggles were mere matter of curiosity and

pastime. I pleaded sickness, and kept closely to my own apartments ; but this proceeding thwarted the projects of my mother, and I was not permitted to persist in my seclusion.

When, after an absence of three days from the party, I was compelled to reappear, I was besieged with compliments and condolences, which were even more bearable than the light and mocking laughter with which I was greeted by Sir James. He declared that I had been engaged in the composition of some new cosmetic, and that I had made trial of it upon myself with most undeniable success, for that he had never seen me look more charming. His callous mockery cut me to the heart ; and I replied with bitterness, as I turned away, and addressed, for the first time in my life willingly, the member for the county in which Woodville was situated, and who was a constant guest at Lord Otterford's.

Mr. Curties was tall, straight, and meagre—one long perpendicular line of humanity ; who, had it not been for the peculiar carriage of his arms, might, at a distance, have been mistaken for his own walking-stick. He was very dull—very sententious, and very shallow—well born, and priding himself highly upon the fact. He also assumed to be well bred, and it was difficult to define why he was not so ; be the reason what it might, however there was a something wanting, trifling, perhaps, in

itself, but still felt to be an omission—a social catalectic, evident at once to the initiated.

Now of all the *habitués* of Woodville, this man had always struck me as being the most uninteresting and impracticable. In conversing, he invariably *looked over* his companion ; for his giraffe-like throat, enveloped in a high, rigidly-starched cravat, was never bent ; and there can be no great interest in a dialogue, during which one of the speakers looks only at the crystal drops of the chandelier. A wrinkle, even in one of his gloves, would have been a relief ; but Mr. Curties never wore ill-fitting gloves ; and every other article of his dress appeared as if he had been inducted into it in his youth, and that they had since grown up together. His very hair was like that of no other man. It was long, and lank, and smooth, and in surface and tint exactly resembled a piece of fawn-coloured satin. His eyes were light blue—very light blue, and almost round ; and his eyebrows, eyelashes, and whiskers, had just escaped the danger of being described as red.

A sudden inspiration restored my good humour at once. I resolved to make an escape-valve of the honourable member ! Nothing could be better. No one would accuse me of coquetry with so unsympathizing and unsentimental a being. It never occurred to me to remember that some people might consider his princely fortune as an equivalent for the absence of

all other attractions ; nor was I aware that he himself avowedly lived in terror of fortune-hunting mammas and establishment-seeking daughters. In short, I had never cared to ascertain that he was the "great match" of the county.

All this was very unfortunate ; but I was happily unconscious of my temerity ; and when I turned upon Mr. Curties the light of the most sunny smile which I could summon *à l'improviste* from amid the dark clouds of my displeasure, I was quietly congratulating myself on the acquisition of a dangler, of whom Devereux, appear when he might, must have too much self-respect to affect jealousy.

How little do women generally suspect the price at which the plainest men estimate their attractions !

If I had, indeed, committed an error, like that of Sir Peter Teazle, it brought its punishment along with it ; for never did fair lady in a fit of petulance entail upon herself such a task as that which I had voluntarily undertaken. A flirtation was my object—a decided flirtation ; which might reduce Sir James Dornton to his proper level, and teach him a salutary lesson. I was young, beautiful, and accomplished ; I was fashionable, and an heiress ; of course I could have Mr. Curties at my feet when I chose to beckon him to that enviable station ;

and equally, of course, I could rid myself of him with a word whenever I became wearied of his homage. I did not know the honourable member for ——. He was no *chien barbet*, to fetch and carry at the caprice of a young lady. He had no objection to the attentions of a married woman, for they could only commit herself; but the preference of a single one might commit *him*, and that was a far more serious matter. He was a “great catch,” and as such, he estimated himself; and we all know that “great catches” are not to be approached like common men.

Thus I could not have possibly made a worse selection than I had done, of an instrument of vengeance; and that Mr. Curties should lend himself to my views, so composedly and collectedly as he did, must be altogether attributed to his regard for his host, and my relative, Lord Otterford.

I was amused by the look of blank astonishment which spread over the features of Lady Madelaine, as she heard me invite Mr. Curties to occupy the vacant seat on the sofa beside me, and then saw me begin to play off upon him all the artillery of the most finished coquetry. She was not yet aware of the extent of my accomplishments, nor of the zeal with which I had studied to imitate her example. My unfortunate victim was evidently bewildered; I had, until that evening, so pertinaciously avoided

him. I had taken so little trouble to conceal how much he bored me whenever he ventured an approach, that his pride was piqued as greatly as his vanity was wounded; and in order to avoid all suspicion of annoyance, he had constantly affected to speak of me with marked admiration. He believed that he had nothing to fear, and was consequently at his ease, which was seldom the case with him when in the society of an unmarried and marriageable woman.

It will be readily understood, under these circumstances, how completely unprepared he was for the sudden demonstrations which it was my peculiar and uncalculating pleasure to make on that particular evening. The poor man fairly lost his *à plomb*, and remained helplessly at my mercy. Conflicting feelings heightened my complexion, and deepened the fire of my eyes. I was exquisitely dressed; for, be my state of mind what it might, I was woman enough never to neglect that all-important fact. I was resolved to exhibit myself to the best advantage, and I well knew the effect of every *pose* and of every gesture of which I availed myself. I was brilliant, even witty: and to be witty beside Mr. Curties betrayed no common power. There was scarcely a subject upon which I did not touch, under cover of his monosyllabic replies; even that vampire aliment scandal hung upon my lips, and was seasoned with smiles.

Sir James stood near, with a frown upon his brow which more than repaid me for my efforts. My mother made a false move upon the board, and was checkmated by Lord Chaffington, to his great and somewhat too audible delight. I had evidently distracted her ideas. Mr. Curties meanwhile was sorely perplexed. Flattered by my unconcealed preference, and not quite decided in how far he might desire to encourage its demonstration, he did nothing but smile, and bow, and utter "yes" and "no," sparingly relieved at intervals by an ejaculation of "indeed!" He trembled lest he should be prematurely compromised. Still he was dazzled—and as that was precisely what I intended, I perceived it at once. Like all dull men, he loved to be amused when he could do it safely; so he did not make an effort to escape, and satisfied himself by giving no tangible encouragement to my sudden *engouement*.

The young Marquis had rearranged the chessmen to the music of his own self-gratulations, but Lady Madelaine declined to tempt fortune a second time—she was bent upon separating me from my new companion.

"Eveleen;" she said, carelessly; "as you are sufficiently recovered to exert yourself, pray let us have some music. Sir James Dornton will, I dare say, accompany you with his flute."

I rose at once, and, extending my hand to Mr.

Curties with a bland smile, requested him to lead me to the harp. "You must not forsake me now;" I added, as he drew forward the music-chair: "I want some one to turn over the leaves, and I am convinced that you will do it admirably."

"I fear not;" said the honourable member hesitatingly: "I am no musician, and may embarrass you."

"By no means. I will prompt you with a nod, thus—so you have only to watch, and there can be no mistake. What shall I play?"

"You are too obliging. I would rather leave the selection to your better taste."

Sir James approached with his flute, upon which he was a proficient, and my resolution was taken at once. I selected a capriccio; upon which it was impossible for that instrument to follow, and dashed at once into its rapid and intricate movements. My manœuvre was thoroughly understood, but it did not produce the effect which I had anticipated. The baronet relinquished his instrument, but he took his stand immediately behind my chair, where he could command every word and look that passed between Mr. Curties and myself. Conscious that such was the case, I had no sooner accomplished my task than I rose and retired to a settee in the extreme corner of the room, and to my infinite satisfaction I was immediately followed by Mr.

Curties, who, as if instinctively, once more dropped into the vacant place at my side. In the next instant Sir James Dornnton had turned the music-chair, and was seated opposite to us, with his back to the rest of the party.

“ You are a happy man, Curties ;” he commenced, as he turned a mocking smile upon me. “ Sooner or later all you *millionaires* are sure to carry off the favour of the young and fair from we poor devils of younger brothers. Even Miss Tilden, you see, ‘ the observed of all observers,’ cannot withstand you ; but beware, lest you should have a score of duels upon your hands.”

“ Now, on my honour, Sir James,” stammered out the affrighted Cræsus, looking down his very long nose, and contracting the muscles of his mouth ; “ you mistake me altogether—I have no pretensions of the kind. This is the first occasion upon which Miss Tilden has done me the honour to converse with me.”

The baronet laughed tauntingly.

“ Nay, nay, do not let me alarm you ;” he said ; “ we all know that you are county property, and consequently not to be trifled with. But again, I say, beware !”

“ I can apprehend no danger in Miss Tilden’s society ;” retorted Mr. Curties with a rigid bow ; “ I only regret that I can profit by it for so short

a time, being compelled to leave Woodville to-morrow morning, with but a very slight hope of being enabled to return during the stay of your delightful party."

I felt the blood rush to my brow. Sir James had triumphed. All the narrow-hearted suspicion and mean conceit of the wealthy bore had been aroused by his inane jest, and I had lessened myself in my own eyes most unavailingly. Do as I would, this man appeared destined to become my evil genius. I hated myself for having even evinced the slightest pleasure in his society. Master of my secret, he well knew his power ; nor did any feeling of delicacy prevent his betraying a consciousness that he held me in his thrall. To increase my annoyance Mr. Curties shortly afterwards rose, and slowly made his way to the other side of the saloon ; and he had no sooner vacated his seat than the baronet took possession of it, with a nonchalance and ease which seemed to imply that the proceeding was a mere matter of course.

" You must have spent a delightful hour, Miss Tilden !" he commenced, as he fell back among the cushions ; " The honourable member for the county which we have just now the honour to inhabit is a delicious companion — so intellectual and charming, especially in the society of pretty

women. What a formidable rival for poor Devereux ! On my soul, I believe I must write and warn him of the perils which environ his Helen. Do you not think that it would be a generous act on my part ?”

“ I have no opinion to offer on the subject.”

“ *Tant mieux.* You are therefore indifferent whether the rumour of your flirtation reach him, or no ? This, at least, is encouraging for *nous autres*. I felt convinced that your late seclusion would prove morally beneficial ; but what, in the name of all that is perpendicular, ever impelled you to turn the light of your smiles upon that unfortunate man yonder, who looks upon every unmarried woman as a drawing-room pickpocket, — a species of matrimonial *chevaliere d'industrie* ?”

“ Your witticisms, Sir James Dornton, are too personal to be pleasant.”

“ Nay, nay—you are too hard upon me. Were you not an hour ago anatomizing your mamma’s pretty page, my little Lord Chaffington, rather freely ?”

“ Am I required, sir, to justify to you either my words or actions ?”

My companion fixed upon me a look that was untranslatable. It seemed at once to dare me to defy him, and to express an assent which he could

not venture to put into words. But this solution I at once felt must be erroneous ; and I turned away my eyes scornfully as he replied with perfect composure—

“ Friendship has privileges even more stringent than that from which you shrink.”

“ Friendship !”

“ Even so.”

“ But that friendship must first exist, and be admitted.”

“ Do you deny me the gratification of feeling it for yourself ?”

“ It is out of my power to do so ; its reciprocity is all that I can control.”

“ And that reciprocity ?”

“ Is at least doubtful.”

“ Indeed !” ejaculated Sir James, elevating his eyebrows somewhat disdainfully ; “ I was not aware that the coquetry of Miss Tilden was quite so expansive. Is it permissible, according to your peculiar code, to admit a mere acquaintance to the bridle-rein of your horse, to your solitary lounge in the grounds, and to your music-stand in the drawing-room ? Come, come ; you are angry, you are indignant, that just as you were angling for a new victim — a *souffre douleur*, who might enable you to escape me and my importunities—I should show the hook to the poor devil, and scare

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and then expressed his regret that he could not execute my commission, as he was not going near town. At the moment, it did not strike me that there was anything extraordinary in this fact ; and I accordingly paid little attention to it. I remembered it afterwards.

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“I deserve to be made a jest for having sacrificed even an hour to such an automaton,” I answered impatiently. “One cannot always account for a visitation of caprice.”

“Caprice!” echoed Lady Madelaine incredulously. “However, I am glad that you were merely indulging a whim (although I would counsel you in future not to make your eccentricities quite so conspicuous;) for I confess that Mr. Curties is not precisely the style of person whom I should covet as a son-in-law; unless, indeed, I could secure him for Adela, of which there is little probability; for your dull men are seldom an easy prey, especially when they sleep with their heads on a rent-roll. He is by no means the Thule of my wishes as regards yourself. I have too much affection for you to contemplate such a sacrifice with satisfaction.”

As she ceased speaking, she looked towards me with a faint smile, as if to demand my acknowledgments. I made a slight bow, and she continued.

“I am aware”—and she said it with some little hesitation—“that circumstances may have led you to doubt the extent and warmth of my feelings towards you. My position has been a trying one; and the world had demands upon me which I could not slight. I became a mother too early; and children spring into women before the plans of their

to take a position. With you will find no difficulty. The important point is the eligibility of that you are both too young to be abandoned to ;

I was about to say of the hand silence

" Nevertheless, I replied, " you will be together satisfied within a few months that the world ; (always except Mr. Curties, which is a village, to the great advantage and the rather, as I conceal your real intentions from my own mind

never venture to interfere on a subject exclusively within the province of a mother, I might have compelled you, not only to an indifferent but even to a repugnant marriage. I disdained to do this ; and, far from enacting the tyrant or the duenna, I left you at perfect liberty to cultivate or to decline the friendship of those by whom you were habitually surrounded. You must have perceived, if you have, indeed, done me the favour to reflect upon the whole tenour of my conduct as regards yourself, that I have left you the complete mistress of your predilections ; that I have interfered in none of your avocations ; and that — ungraceful and unpleasant as it could not fail to be to Lord Otterford to have a womanly daughter-in-law constantly before his eyes and under his roof—I have given you time and opportunity enough to decide on your own fate.”

“ It is decided, madam — it has been long decided.”

“ I am rejoiced to hear it from your own lips, even although circumstances have for some time assured me that it must be so. Had you been about to commit an imprudence, I should long since have interfered ; as it is, I have but to congratulate both you and myself. The only possible difficulty has been removed within the last few weeks ; and, to my own approbation, I am authorized to unite that

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“Proceed, Miss Tilden;” she said in a cold tone, rendered slightly tremulous by the emotion which she could not altogether control; “let no feeling of delicacy towards your mother check the expression of your disgraceful and unmaidenly conjectures. I am prepared to bear even insult with patience.”

“Oh forgive me! forgive me!” I faltered out; “forgive and pity me, for you know not from what a dream of hope and happiness your last words have awakened me! You spoke of my predilections, of my preference; and I was misled by the yearnings of my own heart.”

“Can you deny that you have for some time past given marked encouragement to Sir James Dornon?”

“If I have done so, it has been unwittingly. How could I encourage him when my affections were devoted to another?”

“Better and better!” exclaimed Lady Madeleine; “I now begin to comprehend the hollowness of your character. I weakly believed that your late exhibition with Mr. Curties was a mere girlish piece of inconsistency, but I now find that you act upon a system of deceit, and sacrifice every better feeling to your vanity. How do you pretend, Miss Tilden, to justify your rides, and walks, and *tête-à-têtes* by moonlight upon balconies with

Sir James Dornton? Do you imagine that you will make the world believe you were unconscious that these things were marked and undeniable encouragement to a suit which has long ceased to be problematical to every one around you? Or, can you for an instant suppose that I shall submit to see a daughter of mine made a mark for the world's scorn. Your own conduct has decided your fate. On Sir James's return to Woodville, you will receive him as your accepted husband, without the slightest symptom of repugnance or hesitation—or, you must abide the consequences."

I wrung my hands in agony. Too late did I perceive the fearful advantage which my own thoughtlessness had given to the projects of my mother.

"In truth you are a sad victim!" once more resumed Lady Madelaine, as she looked down upon me with withering contempt; "you are steeped in tears—and for what? Because you are about to become the wife of an accomplished, high-born, and fashionable man, and that you will be an object of envy to half the women in town."

"I would rather die!" I exclaimed vehemently. "I do not, I shall never love him. We should both be wretched."

"He consents to run the risk."

"He cannot be so selfish or so base—he knows

that I love another—he knows that I am beloved. He will have pity on my tears—on my despair.”

My mother laughed scornfully.

“Rise, Miss Tilden ; rise, and recollect yourself ;” she said sternly ; “we are not now rehearsing a tragedy, nor am I disposed to hear you rhapsodize on the subject of your boy-lover, Mr. Devereux, whom I suppose to be the object of this tirade. Leave the remedy for his baby-passion in the hands of Sir James Dornton ; he is a man of sense as well as a man of the world, and will soon make you ashamed of your extravagance. As to Devereux, he has long ceased even to remember your existence.”

This taunt aroused my pride at once. I sprang to my feet, and even ventured to meet the threatening eye of Lady Madelaine without quailing. “The proof that he has not done so,” I said firmly, “exists in the fact that you have exiled him from your house—his uncle’s house—from the hour in which I became its inmate. No, madam ; I may be your victim—you may profit by the thoughtlessness which has placed my fate in your power, but you cannot deprive me of the certainty that I am beloved by Herbert Devereux.”

“A noble triumph !” exclaimed my mother ; “but a sorry one for both of you, if such be indeed

the case; for I cannot suppose that even you, Miss Tilden, are so utterly a coquette at heart as to derive any gratification from the prospect of his sufferings; while on your own side, the inconveniences might be greater than you can possibly anticipate. Be advised, while there is yet time. Do not attempt to oppose my will, beneath which you must bend at last. The wife of Herbert Devereux you shall never be. Receive with becoming submission the husband whom I have selected for you, and conquer your repugnance by remembering that you have long treated him as a favoured suitor, and that you are consequently in his power. And now, retire to your room, and endeavour to make yourself presentable before you are seen by any of the guests. Not a word!" For I was again about to speak. "I shall hold no further conversation with you upon this subject, until you can discuss it in a becoming spirit of obedience."

Before she ceased speaking, she rang the bell violently, and I hurried from the room to escape the observation of her women.

I have no words in which to paint my wretchedness when I again found myself alone. All my love for Devereux had been previously weak and languid to what I felt for him at that moment; while my dislike of the baronet became compara-

tively stronger and more bitter. I hated myself also for the weakness which had induced me to gratify my vanity and idleness by permitting his attentions. In short I was miserable ; and so far from attempting to efface the traces of my agitation, I gave free vent to my tears and sobs, and encouraged the feeling of desolation and bitterness which had taken possession of me.

Suddenly I thought of my sister. She was in possession of my secret ; I remembered the strength and resolution of her character. There was yet hope for me. I determined to confide to her my present sufferings, and to be guided by her advice. I had neglected her too much of late. Absorbed in pleasure, there was nothing around me to recall her image, but now that sorrow had fallen upon me it rose vividly to my remembrance. I sat down eagerly to my desk, wiped away my tears, and commenced forthwith the outpouring of my grief.

I accused my mother of cold-hearted selfishness, and Lord Otterford of unwarrantable interference. I apostrophized Sir James Dornton ; I declared my detestation of him in no measured terms ; and I upbraided myself for having tolerated him as I had done. My letter was full of passionate ejaculations, of incoherent vows and exclamations. Finally, having exhausted the vocabulary of exple-

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Two days subsequently

advise resistance? and, if so, should I have courage to resist? Would she counsel me to yield? Would she bid me fling away all hope of happiness? For a moment I dreaded to open the letter; but at length, unable longer to control my impatience, I tore it hastily from its envelope, and read as follows:—

“Do not anticipate, I entreat, any advice from me. There are circumstances in which the heart alone should be the counsellor, and yours appears to me to be a case in point. If you are not beloved, your fate is frightful. If you are—believe me when I tell you that there exist others far more worthy of pity than yourself.”

I was thunderstruck. The letter had neither commencement nor signature. The writing was disjointed, rambling, and altogether unlike the usual neat and carefully-formed characters of my sister's hand. Brief, abrupt, and obscure, the matter of the communication was as unexpected as the manner. I read and re-read it half a dozen times, hoping to detect some hidden meaning, or to convince myself that it was a counterfeit, but I could not succeed in doing either; and at last, worn out with disappointment and mortification, I tore it into a thousand fragments.

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heart is elsewhere—or whose affections are exhausted. What if his affected passion should be a mere fancy—a mere caprice? What must inevitably be the result of such a marriage? Or, worse still”—and here a new terror grew upon me—“what if he should be the tool of Lady Madeleine’s cold-hearted policy—if it should be to please her that he has offered himself, to prevent my union with Herbert Devereux? To make me miserable, that he is about to *sacrifice* himself? I have youth, beauty, fashion, station—all that can flatter his ambition; he is no longer young—he has long been the slave of my mother’s will—Alas! alas!—I have fallen upon the bitter, the mortifying truth!”

Again I wept; but, after a time, I began to feel ashamed of my own cowardice: “After all,” I said mentally, “I cannot be compelled to marry this man. My mother is tyrannical and self-willed, it is true, but she is not omnipotent. I have my weapons, even as she has hers. I have been too easy, too familiar, too condescending to Sir James. I will show him, and all the world, that I am aware of this. He shall now see that I am not, like himself, a mere tool in the hands of others.”

I was faithful to the pledge thus tacitly made. Sir James, on his return, no sooner approached me, than I armed myself in all the panoply of my

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the mere wish to please my mother, had grown into a feeling towards myself, over which he could no longer exercise a control that would have spared his pride? The idea was at least a flattering one: and I found myself well inclined to indulge in it. Not once did it occur to me that my fortune might play a prominent part in the farce. At eighteen, girls never think so meanly of themselves as to believe that the possession of their affections can be put into competition with that of their purse, or that a few thousands more or less may have power to control their destiny; at eight-and-twenty, when the world has educated them, they modify their creed.

. I was not sorry when I had argued myself into the belief that I had done Dornton injustice. I relaxed a little, in consequence, in manner as well as in feeling; but my concession extended no further. As a husband I could not look upon him with anything save aversion. Amid all my folly and frivolity I never forgot Devereux, and never ceased to look forward with hope to his reappearance.

CHAPTER XIV.

My mother looked on in silence. I attributed her neutrality to weariness of the conflict. I wronged her ; I should have placed it to the credit of her diplomacy. She was suffering the enemy to exhaust his strength in idle skirmishing. Dictatorial as she was, she did not wish my marriage with her *protégé* to appear one of compulsion. She was too well-bred to volunteer herself as a spectacle to all her circle ; and she had wit enough to see that in my then frame of mind, opposition would only serve to strengthen my determination. The contest between us was unequal. Like her countrymen, the Campbells, Lady Madelaine was content to "bide her time ;" while she well knew that the factitious spirit of courage which I had so suddenly summoned would moulder away of itself, if left disregarded, like a column of sandstone. The material of which it was built up was not of a nature to endure. She had communicated

her will, and now preserved a dignified silence, leaving the rest to the attentions of Sir James, who might well be supposed to possess more than sufficient experience of the sex, to overcome the stubborn will and childish attachment of a mere girl.

Dornton was, however, by no means so certain of his ultimate success as my mother assumed to be. My conduct was too consistent to have grown out of a momentary whim ; and he was, probably, less satisfied with my partial return towards courtesy, than he would have been under a persistence in the ultra measures which I originally adopted. He felt that he made no progress, and, without doubt, he communicated his conviction to Lady Madelaine ; for the avalanche suddenly fell when I had ceased to dread its descent.

A new summons to her dressing-room struck a chill to my heart. The hour was indeed come ! I sank trembling into a chair, and for a few minutes was unable even to ask myself if I had strength left to contend. Gradually, however, I recovered some degree of self-possession, and began to make formidable promises to my own heart. The happiness of Devereux depended upon my firmness—of this fact I had never permitted myself to entertain a doubt—therefore I was in honour bound not to yield. I argued upon false pre-

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first step in life. Is it not a flattering *débüt*? You are silent; and perhaps you are right, for it is a circumstance by no means agreeable of discussion either to yourself or your family. We have now done with it for ever."

I began to breathe more freely; I even rose to leave the room.

"One word more before we part;" pursued my mother in the same cold and caustic tone as before. "Although the cause is removed, the effects remain. My daughter, Miss Tilden, is already a marked woman—marked as a heartless coquette. You are at the mercy of Sir James; and men who have been jilted as he has been by you possess little of that forbearing virtue. Had I contemplated your appearance in town for a second season unmarried, your fate would ere now have been fixed for ever. Sir James Dornton is not an obscure individual whose sarcasm would fall harmless; he is a man of fashion and figure, popular, witty, and distinguished; whose first sneer would have blighted your prospects. Fortunately, however, you are rescued from this peril. Your inconsistent and incautious conduct has determined me no longer to burthen myself with the responsibility of your guardianship, or to suffer you to have a voice in any measure in which you are concerned. It is, therefore, sufficient to inform you that I have this day had the

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suddenly, shaking off the panic terror which had seized upon me ;—" No, madam ; you seek in vain to terrify me. You cannot have such a project. Have you never, then, read the German tale of the living man who was attached to a corpse, and so thrust forth to exist as he might ?—the quick and the dead brought together in unnatural contact—the breathing and the breathless linked each to the other by a hateful and revolting bond ? Do you talk of me and Mr. Curties as man and wife ?—do you think that I could exist a month beneath his roof in such a character ? If I have acted weakly, idly, I will not shrink from any just rebuke ; but such a threat as this is refined cruelty, which I cannot, faulty as I am, have deserved."

" I know not what you may consider to be your deserts, Miss Tilden ;" replied Lady Madelaine perfectly unmoved by my agony ; " I am only cognizant of the consequences which your peculiar system of conduct has entailed upon you. Your baby-love business with Herbert Devereux made you at once the amusement and the prophetic theme of my drawing-room. I doubt much whether, at the period of my leaving Rooksley for town immediately after my discovery of your extreme levity, you believed that I was at all occupied by speculations for your welfare ; but in that, as well as in many other things, you were both wrong and unjust."

I looked round upon all the eligible men in my circle ; but I did not see there one whom I could dare to hope would, despite your fortune, assist you to repair the past. It was not until after the death of your father that, profiting by an accidental influence over Sir James Dornton, I induced him to consent to offer himself as your suitor."

As my mother sententiously uttered this offensive declaration, I felt as though my wounded vanity, and, still worse, my womanly pride, prostrated in its holiness and purity, would have suffocated me. Lady Madelaine looked towards me, as if she were prepared for some comment upon her words ; but my emotion was so great that I could not articulate a syllable.

" Yes ;" she pursued, following up what she evidently believed to be her triumph ; " fortunately for you, misguided girl, who had already called down remark by your inconsequent behaviour, Sir James Dornton had sufficient regard for my feelings to—"

I recovered my self-government in an instant ; the excess of my indignation and the extremity of my situation rendered me calm to an extent which surprised myself.

" It is, indeed, matter of self-gratulation to me," I said firmly, as I raised my eyes steadily to hers ; " that, when it became necessary to repair the

effects of my misguided conduct, your ladyship, who are, of course, altogether irreproachable in your relations with the other sex, should have chanced to possess so great an 'accidental influence' over a man generous enough, when he became convinced that he could not make himself master of the fortune and fashion of the mother, to condescend to exchange for them the fortune and youth of the daughter. But, madam, even as the mother *would* not, so also the daughter *will* not."

I shall never forget the rage of Lady Madelaine her quivering lips were as white as her forehead ; her hands were tightly clenched ; and for an instant I believed that she would strike me ; but after a brief struggle, she unclasped her fingers, and fell back in her chair, as she demanded the meaning of my words.

"It is simple, madam ;" I answered ; "and it will suffice to tell you that I remember the visit of Sir James to Rooksley during your first period of widowhood ; your long interview, and, above all, your mutual re-appearance in the drawing-room ; he, gloomy, embarrassed, and taciturn ; you, radiant with ill-concealed triumph."

"And what more, Miss Tilden ?"

"Nothing ; save that I will never marry the rejected suitor of my mother."

"Truly, you do well ;" said Lady Madelaine with

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he could not prove—gave utterance to no suspicions which he could not justify ; and at my first mention of my intention of compelling you to fulfil the hopes which you had not scrupled to create, he did what few men would have had sufficient pride or honour to have done—he declared his resolution to abandon his suit at once. I have already hinted to you what may be the after-consequences of his estrangement ; and it is now, moreover, too late to calculate their probable effect in the world. You are fortunate in having secured a new suitor who is ignorant of your antecedents at so eventful a moment.”

I was so terrified by the colouring which Lady Madelaine had so ingeniously given to the past, that all my courage abandoned me. I forgot how impossible it was for her to compel me to a hateful marriage—I forgot the pledge which I had given to my own heart to be worthy of the love of Devereux—I forgot Devereux himself. I thought only of the rigid, cold, impracticable Mr. Curties, with his endless monosyllables and untiring self-appreciation. Was *he* to be the climax of my dreams?—the partner of my after-life? The vision was too bitter to support. Every other feeling gave way before it ; and, fairly conquered, I cast myself at the knees of my obdurate mother, and gasped out between my sobs—“ Have pity on me !—have pity on me !”

I was too wretched, too thoroughly prostrated in spirit at that moment to remember what a triumph this scene would have been to Adela, could she have witnessed it; how complete a justification it would have proved of all her doubts and of all her prophecies. I was wholly absorbed in self; my pride and my passion were alike dormant.

“No tragedy, I entreat,” Miss Tilden;” said Lady Madelaine, waving me away; “I can brook no further contradiction. I am indignant at this perpetual disobedience, and will no longer encourage it by the weakness which I have hitherto displayed.”

Overwhelmed by the cold decision of her tone, I attempted no reply. I buried my face in the cushion of her *fauteuil*, and wept.

“You fatigue my patience and outrage my pride, Evleen;” she pursued after a pause; “pray, endeavour to be rational. Retire to your room; or, if you persist in remaining here in defiance of my wishes, cease to make yourself ridiculous, and tell me upon what line of conduct you have decided?”

There was a slight softening in her tone as she concluded her address, which once more awoke in me something like hope. I raised my head, and with clasped hands I faltered out, “Save me—oh! save me from this hateful marriage!”

“I cannot, consistently with your future welfare.”

“ Send me back to Rooksley—to Scotland—anywhere—let me not be heard of again by the world which has judged me so harshly—I will submit to any exile ; but do not compel me to become the wife of a man whom I should infallibly detest.”

“ If you have no better arguments than these to advance, they will produce no effect upon me ;” replied my mother. “ You can neither return to Rooksley nor to Scotland ; we are not enacting a romance. You must marry Mr. Curties, since you did not consider Sir James Dornton worthy of your hand ; and if you do not submit with a good grace to a marriage which you have brought upon yourself by your own levity, I shall, without further hesitation, exert my authority, and compel you to pay a proper regard to the dignity both of yourself and your family.”

“ All is then over !” I exclaimed as I rose ; “ and I have nothing left but to die.”

Lady Madelaine laughed contemptuously.—“ From what novel did you learn that phrase, child ? It is utterly absurd. A woman does not die because she sacrifices her inclination to her duty. I gave a proof of that very trite truth when I married your father.”

I disdained, wretched as I was, to reply to so coarse a taunt.

“ Are you not ashamed,” she pursued, “ to play

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free to choose between

must decide at once. I am now going to reply to the letter of Mr. Curties ; he shall not, he cannot, under the circumstances, be left in suspense or doubt for a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. Lord Otterford has interest in the county, which may be ruined by a rupture with a person so locally influential. I forbid you to utter another word, unless it be to express your decision."

The alternative was a bitter one ; but the difference between my two suitors was so great, that, had selection been the only difficulty, I could not have hesitated for a moment ; even as it was, the idea of becoming the wife of Sir James was less distasteful to me than it had hitherto been, because the personal and social defects of his rival brought out his own qualities in bright relief. Of him I could not, at least, be ashamed. He might make me wretched, but he would never make me blush ; nevertheless, I could not utter the word which was required of me. I still expostulated, still pleaded—the image of Devereux once more rose up before me, and I regained a little courage ; but I was no match for the strong will of Lady Madelaine. She drew her writing-table towards her ; selected a crow-quill from the desk, with as much care as though she had been about to transcribe her first billet-doux ; and then addressing me once more, she asked with perfect composure—

departure?"

"Oh, for pity again!" I implore

"Then you ask Sir James Dormer

"He has with

"Do not trifle told you that I do Sir James."

"But would you, madam, to the honour accepted as a favour

"Assuredly no world, or of the name Sir James that you because your coquetry out he submitted to with you were pleased now see your error

“ That I am about to become Lady Dornton,” I murmured, almost inaudibly.

“ What an effort of courage !” exclaimed my mother, shrugging her shoulders : “ and now go to your room, and bathe your eyes. I can converse with you no longer at present, and must be careful in the wording of my letter. It is by no means easy to tell a gentleman, with proper courtesy, that he is rejected.”

I waited no further bidding, but rushed from the room, just as Lady Madelaine was preparing to throw herself upon the sofa, in order to obtain a little repose after her unwonted exertion. It never occurred to me, poor innocent ! that I had been duped. It never struck me that the letter of Mr. Curties, of which I heard so much, remained invisible. I little suspected, in short, when I cast myself upon my knees, to weep out the bitterness of my sorrow, and to endeavour to collect my thoughts, that Lady Madelaine and Lord Otterford were laughing together over the mystification of which I had been made the victim.

Lord Otterford was revenged.

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might, however, have spared myself the suffering. My mother had doubtlessly little trouble in convincing herself of the purpose for which I sought the interview, and her reply simply announced that she should see me at table.

I felt, even while I despised myself for the weakness, like a reprieved criminal. I was compelled to confess to my own heart how much I feared her, as a sensation of intense relief grew upon me with the conviction, that before witnesses I had nothing to apprehend from her violence. Woodville was still full of guests; the absence of Sir James and Mr. Curties had left but a small blank; and the house was a constant scene of gaiety and amusement. Still, although I hugged myself under a sense of present security, and tried to believe that, even as it had chanced to many of my favourite heroines, *something* would and must occur to prevent the fulfilment of Lady Madelaine's project, I could not altogether forget that by my inertness I was strengthening her power.

How often did I sigh for a portion of Adela's firmness—how often did the tears spring into my eyes as I remembered our separation, which deprived me of her advice and support at so critical a moment. During my hours of triumph and dissipation I seldom thought of her; and her memory, even when I did so, was always productive to me

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tion of sympathy they chance to draw down upon themselves a confidence of suffering, it sounds in their ears like the shriek of the mandrake, which brought ruin upon him who called it forth.

Thus I was cast wholly upon myself; and once I almost formed the resolution of writing, to claim the counsel and assistance of Lady O'Halloran; but this my pride forbade: I could not brook that she should learn how utterly her kind and motherly advice had failed in its object; I could not calmly sit down to tell her that I had lost all authority over my fate by my own idle imprudence; and thus this rational and honest purpose was blighted in the bud.

At noon, on the fifth day succeeding our interview, I was once more informed that Lady Madelaine desired to see me in her morning-room. In spite of my better reason I still hoped; and the rather, as I had heard Lord Otterford inform one of the guests on the previous evening, that Sir Herbert and Lady Devereux were hourly expected at Woodville. I almost forgot my fears as I remembered this. Without doubt Captain Devereux would be their companion; and, perhaps——! I, however, had not time to follow up the inspirations of my brightening fancy; and it was with a flushed cheek and a flashing eye that I found myself in the presence of Lady Madelaine.

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ever yet appear
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and curdle at it
for my mother h
from her chair—
Are you faint ?

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"This is inn
Lady Madelaine p
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it, that no husband
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almost immediately appeared, to request that Sir James Dornton would favour her with his company for a few minutes in her own sitting-room.

I bounded from my chair.

“ Yes, Eveleen ;” she said, as she marked my action ; “ Sir James is here. I have already seen him ; but, as I wished to spare you both, I thought it better that you should meet, for the first time as affianced lovers, in private. All opposition is now too late. Let me not have to complain of you in this instance, or I vow to you that I will recall Mr. Curties by to-morrow’s post, and you shall become his wife within six months.”

I knew my mother’s iron will too well to doubt her for an instant ; nor, even had I possessed resolution at that moment to contend, should I have had time to do so ; for, as she ceased speaking, I heard steps in the library, whence Lady Madeleine’s room opened ; and, before I could have uttered a word, the door fell back, and Sir James entered, and closed it carefully behind him.”

I had meanwhile rushed to the window to conceal my tears, and stood there, half-buried among the curtains.

“ Eveleen at last renders you justice, my dear Sir James ;” said my mother, as he moved towards her ; “ and we both hope that you will pardon all her past coquetry. It was, as I told

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Sir James. "I think it, on the contrary, vastly amusing; and if, at the same time, it amuses Miss Tilden, I see no reason why she should refuse herself so innocent a gratification. No, no; it is by no means of Mr. Curties that I should feel inclined to be jealous."

The malicious emphasis of his last phrase was not lost upon me. I bit my lips with suppressed rage, but I compelled myself to silence.

"Is Lady Devereux arrived?" asked my mother, as if anxious to change the conversation; "I thought I heard the sound of wheels upon the gravel before your entrance; but, as I had given orders not to be disturbed, no visitor has been announced."

"Yes, she is here—all animation and brilliancy; and will think every minute an hour until she has seen you."

"I will not defer the meeting any longer; my welcome is as ready as it is sincere," said my mother, rising from her chair, and advancing to the door of the library.

I understood her intention at once; I was to be left *tête-à-tête* with Sir James, but for this I had neither strength nor temper; and, accordingly, I withdrew with a stately curtsey from beside him; and, as she disappeared through one door, I escaped by the other.

I hoped that, once alone again, I should become more calm, but I was wrong. I only felt the wretchedness of my position more acutely; and the momentary hope in which I had so idly indulged served to render my increased disappointment the more bitter. It was with a feeling of powerlessness and despair that I sat down to review every phase of my situation in detail. I called up the past—dwelt upon words and looks that I had hitherto almost forgotten; and lingered over them long, very long—but I did not shed a tear; I examined, rigorously and resolutely, my conduct towards both Sir James and Mr. Curties; and, although I was compelled to admit that it had been childish and inconsistent, still I could not bring myself to believe that it authorized the tyranny with which I had since been treated. But when I at last began to reflect that I was now, and by my own tacit consent, the affianced wife of Sir James Dornton, the discarded suitor of my mother—for of that fact I never for a moment entertained a doubt—then again my tears burst out afresh, and for a few seconds I thought that I should have suffocated. Nor was this all. The scene of the morning was still visibly before me; and how had my proffered hand—for it had indeed been proffered, and not asked—how had it been received? With a cold bow and a few studied

sentences. I felt that now indeed I was dishonoured ; that now, indeed, my dignity was humbled. Had not the man to whom I was to be tied for life been solicited to accept me ? Had he not been asked to forgive all that he disapproved ?—and had he not disdainfully made known to me at once that I was free to smile upon a rival, without one apprehension of wounding either his pride or his self-love ?

Let any woman, accustomed to the voice of adulation, and more, to the accents of passion, place herself for an instant in my position ; and then let her confess how much more readily she would encounter some real sorrow, which, while it crushed her heart, still spared her self-respect.

How differently would Devereux have acted at such a moment ! We are all so apt to appreciate ourselves at the value set upon us by those who love us best, that I was thoroughly *désorientée* by the events of the few last weeks ; and my thoughts once more fastened upon Herbert. “ Ah ! ” I mentally exclaimed, “ what would have been his indignation if he had heard my mother soliciting, in my behalf, the indulgence of Sir James Dornton ? And I have weakly submitted to this degradation—I have, coward as I am, consented to receive as a suitor the man who, at such a moment, approaches me with covert insult ! ”

These reflections almost maddened me. I felt as though I should become delirious. I was frightened at myself. Once I rose, in a state of desperation, resolved to seek Lady Madelaine, and to declare to her, even though she should be surrounded by her guests, that I would not become the passive tool of her exacting pleasure; but a fresh terror soon grew upon me, and her threat of recalling Mr. Curties once more chained my steps.

I sent to beg that I might be excused from appearing at dinner; but my request was peremptorily refused. I consequently revenged myself in the only way possible to me; and enraged Joséphine by a careless and ill-assorted costume, which rendered me odious in my own eyes. I was, moreover, as pale as marble; and there was a dark circle about my swollen eyes that betrayed the tears I had so lately shed. I had nerved myself for a reprimand, for I was callous to all minor annoyances; but I ought to have understood my mother better. She had reserved for me a trial infinitely greater.

As I had delayed my appearance until after the second dinner-bell had rung, the party were all assembled when I reached the drawing-room; and I had scarcely crossed the threshold, when Lady Madelaine exclaimed in affected gaiety—
“Oh! here is the bride elect at last. Eveleen is

presuming upon her privileges already. You must not encourage such pretensions, Sir James, or she will be spoiled before the termination of the honeymoon."

I stopped abruptly where I stood ; I could not move forward another step ; and I looked helplessly around upon the groups before me, as if awaiting some further trial of my feelings ; but for once I wronged them. The sarcastic nature of the baronet, his well-known admiration of my mother, his limited fortune, and the disparity of our ages, joined to the visible suffering imprinted upon my countenance, offered no inducement to their congratulations. A dead silence followed the sally of Lady Madelaine, and I felt grateful to those who had so spared me.

Sir James, as a matter of course, led me to table. Every one, indeed, gave back as he approached, evidently acknowledging his claim.

" Poor Eveleen?" he whispered, as he drew my arm through his ; " your mother is, indeed, merciless."

I looked at him in astonishment, almost expecting to detect a mockery in his eye which would belie his words ; but I was mistaken. His better feelings had evidently been revolted by an indelicacy in which Lady Madelaine had sacrificed her good breeding to her ruffled temper.

Throughout the whole of the time occupied by dinner, the baronet continued to devote his entire attention to myself; but, despite all his attempts to appear gay and unembarrassed, I could perceive that at intervals he was overtaken by some painful thought, from which he had to exert considerable effort to rouse himself. Once or twice I detected a smothered sigh, which he immediately endeavoured to drown under a forced laugh, frequently got up strangely *mal-à-propos*; and altogether, I rose from table embittered against my mother, mystified by my intended bridegroom, and dissatisfied and wretched in myself.

We had no sooner reached the drawing-room, than Lady Devereux, who, during the presence of the gentlemen, had only recognized me by a nod, beckoned me to her side upon a sofa; and, after touching my cheek with her lips, began to whisper out her surprise at the news which she had just learnt of my engagement.

“Who would have expected, Eveleen, that you, who were the toy of your mother’s circle at Rooksley, at the period when Sir James was, if not dangler *en chef*, at least dangler *en second*, would ever have consented that matters should be reconciled in this way! — Poor Sir James! Nothing can alter the fact that he was the first favourite, although Otterford proved the most suc-

cessful. However, Lady Madelaine has shown herself to be an able general."

"I do not understand you," I said coldly.

"Really! I gave you credit for a quicker apprehension; but perhaps it is better as it is. At all events, I cannot resist complimenting you upon a concession which must have been very agreeable to your mother for many reasons."

"That reflection is at least consoling," I remarked with some haughtiness.

"*Consoling*, Eveleen!" echoed the particular friend of my mother, with an eagerness which proved that she had at length found her text-word. "What can you mean by consoling? You were no faded and forsaken beauty, driven to a matrimonial *pis aller*. You had other alternatives; at all events, another alternative;" she added, correcting herself; "why then do you talk of needing consolation?"

This outburst on the part of Lady Devereux at once astonished and bewildered me. Hitherto, she had rarely condescended to remark my existence; and now she suddenly assumed a confidential tone and position which left me at a loss how to proceed. That she was piqued was sufficiently evident. Could it be because the interests of her son would suffer by my marriage with Dornton? Nothing would be more natural; but, miserable and despairing as I was, I

nevertheless remembered that, in the event of my being unable to disengage myself from my tacit promise to Sir James, I should never forgive myself when once his wife, if I had ever shown sufficient weakness to bewail my fate to an indifferent person, and, far more, to the mother of the man I loved. How dare I tell her that my heart was still full of her son, when she saw me quietly permit myself to be announced as the destined bride of another person? All these reflections passed hurriedly before me, and I answered still more coldly than at first; "Surely, every woman needs consolation who is about to stake her liberty against a chance."

Lady Devereux bit her lips, and looked keenly at me. She had not anticipated so much self-possession on my part, and she was evidently disappointed. "In any case," she resumed, as she threw herself back upon the sofa, and closed her eyes, as if to intimate that our conference was ended, "you will be quite secure against the censure of the world, for it cannot accuse you of having married either for wealth or for youth; or, in all probability, from that unfashionable impulse, love. You will have contracted, in every point of view, a marriage of reason—and I sincerely wish that it may prove a happy one."

I accepted my tacit dismissal with the same apparent indifference which I had sustained during

the dialogue, but my heart was bursting. It was then palpable to every one that I was a mere passive tool in the hands of Lady Madelaine. What did the words of her angry friend imply?—Simply that I had been sacrificed to Dornton, as compensation for her own preference of Lord Otterford! Every pulse of my heart beat with agony and wounded pride, but I was like a lion in the toils. I had no outward strength: I had only power to suffer, not to strive.

I had seated myself upon a settee, occupying a recess which was half concealed from view by an Indian screen, and I was thus able to indulge my tears without restraint. Was every day, almost every hour, to produce a new insult? And was I to bear them tamely, and as though I had earned them by my own misconduct? And then I thought of the mysterious and contradictory manner of Sir James, and I asked myself if it were possible that I should ever love him. The image of Devereux rose up as I put the question, and the answer was a fresh burst of tears.

The sound of voices in the hall warned me that I must no longer indulge in such feelings, and I hastily removed the traces of my weeping, and shrunk still closer behind my protecting screen.

Lady Devereux opened her eyes, and assumed a more graceful attitude; my mother desired Lord

Chaffington to seek for a bottle of Hungary water among the essences on a side table ; two or three men, who had commenced a political discussion in the dining-room, collected upon the hearth-rug to pursue it ; Lord Otterford established himself beside Lady Devereux, and immediately commenced a very animated conversation in an undertone ; and Sir James Dornton, after one hurried glance round the room, hastily approached my retreat.

“ I fear, Miss Tilden, that you are exasperated against me ;” he commenced, as he placed himself at my side ; “ and yet, I assure you, on my honour, that I do not merit this extreme displeasure. It is true that I ventured, like others, to aspire to your favour ; but you should do me the justice to remember also, that I withdrew when I had ascertained beyond all doubt that my pretensions were displeasing to you. It was your own voice which recalled me ; and although for a few instants my pride was at war with my tenderness, and I could not avoid reverting to the unnecessary mortification to which I had been subjected, still I did not love you the less because I betrayed how much I had suffered from your coldness.”

“ All this would be well, Sir James ;” I replied proudly ; “ if you had not previously assumed so perfect a knowledge of all my former life. As it is, I beg you to spare me every mockery of the

kind. We understand each other too well. If you could command one generous impulse, you would refuse a hand which, as you well know, has been promised to you, not freely nor willingly, but by the force of another's will. Do this, and my dislike and avoidance will at once be changed into gratitude and regard."

Sir James looked at me for a moment as if in pity of my simplicity ; and then, endeavouring to take my hand, which, however, I coldly withdrew as soon as he had touched it, he said in a low and impassioned accent ; " It is easy for you to talk thus, Eveleen ; you, to whom I am only, as you have yourself declared, an object of dislike and of avoidance ; but, as it is far otherwise with me, I *cannot* do what you ask. Your possession is necessary to my happiness. For a long time it appeared unattainable, yet still I persisted to hope ; and do you imagine that I now possess courage willingly to resign the boon for which I have so long sighed in vain ?"

" And will the hand satisfy you when the heart is withheld, I ask in my turn ?" I rejoined. " Truly your pride is far from equalling your pertinacity !"

" I forgive your scorn, Eveleen ;" said Dornton quietly ; " ere long you will do me greater justice."

" My fiat will depend upon yourself."

" As my wife—"

“ That will I never be, while one chance of escape remains.”

“ Miss Tilden !” exclaimed my listener in astonishment ; “ what am I to understand ? Do you intend that I should once more be made a mark for your caprice and coquetry ?”

“ Sir !” I ejaculated in my turn, and would have risen, but he held me to my seat.

“ Listen, Eveleen ;” he said, as his eye flashed haughtily down upon me ; “ all these recriminations are at once idle and ill-bred. Occupied by one vain and impracticable vision, you neither do justice to yourself nor me. Be warned in time. I am not a man whom you can exasperate with safety. You may make of me a tyrant or a slave ; I am now in your power ; do not, I beseech you, let me see you place yourself recklessly in mine.”

“ Am I not already there ?”

“ Not as I mean you to understand my words. You are too handsome to be obdurate—too well-bred to be unjust. Of what do you accuse me ? Of loving you ! Surely I am not alone in the transgression ; although, according to your favourite system,

“ That in the leader’s but a choleric word
Which in the soldier is rank blasphemy ;”

and, moreover, as you will only have to show yourself in the world for another season, in order to increase a

hundred-fold the number of delinquents, I do not think it reasonable that I should be the only one called upon to suffer for the sins of the mass."

I still pouted, but I was woman enough to be somewhat touched by the turn of his argument. I was, however, far from well-disposed towards him. He exhibited too perfect a feeling of security ; and, in my self-tormenting thoughts, I began to decide that I was destined to suffer every distinct mortification of which my situation was susceptible. Indignant with my mother ; irritated against Sir James, whom I mentally accused of tyranny and meanness ; terrified at the bare name of Mr. Curties, which always sufficed to check every demonstration of independence on my part, and utterly abandoned to those whose interests were at war with my own, I became perfectly bewildered. Sometimes I began to ask myself whether Devereux had not indeed forgotten me, as Lady Madelaine had asserted ; and whether I could not live happily as the wife of Dornton. There was no efficient rival at Woodville to throw a shade over either his moral or physical advantages ; the men envied and the women feared him, and I knew this.

After the brief conversation which I have just recorded, Sir James affected never again to remark my coldness. He had evidently *pris son parti*. He assumed, with an ease for which I loathed him, all

the privileges of a declared lover ; he became tender, anxious, and devoted. Once more he put forth all the causticity and point of his never-failing wit ; all the research and charm of his well-cultivated intellect. Every one was loud in his praise ; and eager to ascribe to my influence his increased powers of pleasing. In my favour, however, he made little actual progress. Moments there were in which I was, like those about me, dazzled and fascinated. His personal beauty, his perfect self-possession, and the unhesitating ease with which he discussed every subject, and decided upon the merits of every person ; the scintillations of satire, half witty and half malicious, which occasionally placed his listeners in the position of children, who, attracted by the beauty of the wasp, entail its sting upon themselves, when they merely seek the amusement of grasping it for a moment ; all these definite attributes sustained my attention, and mastered my indifference. I had resolved to hate him ; I even believed that I should soon succeed in doing so ; but my belief was vain. In order to hate Sir James Dornon, you must have been slighted by him ; and this was not my case.

Day after day he increased in wit, in amiability, and in devotion. He created, as it seemed, a new atmosphere about me. Even Lady Madelaine no longer ventured to disturb my gradually increasing

equanimity. I soon saw the futility of endeavouring to nourish my vehement dislike, so I abandoned the project, and sheltered myself under a listless indifference. No idea of ever loving him entered into my imagination. Had I not another image shrined in my heart of hearts ! I felt convinced that I could never look upon him more favourably ; and I rather congratulated myself that I had overcome my extreme aversion. After all, I had read more than once that indifference was the state most antipathetical to passion, and most hopeless for a suitor ; and I satisfied my pride that precisely to that point I had arrived ; and that, come what might, nothing could now alter my feeling. Dorn-ton, however, thought otherwise. With but little moral esteem for women, and a very high opinion of himself, his confidence in his own powers was unbounded. He had vowed that he would overcome my coldness ; and his ingenuity, prompted by a vanity which never slumbered, was constantly exerted for the purpose.

Time passed on, unheeded by me. I forgot that, sooner or later, the day must ultimately arrive on which I should be required to fulfil my promise, and to become the wife of Sir James. Not a syllable had for weeks been uttered to remind me of this fact ; and I had lived day after day in a sort of moral apathy, avoiding alike all retrospection and

all speculation on the future ; I had existed only like the ephemeris, in the moment, and for the moment. I was first aroused to something like a suspicion of the truth, by the frequent visits to town which my mother suddenly found it necessary to make ; and in which, while she was only occasionally accompanied by her husband, she was always attended by the baronet. No remark was, however, made before me upon the purport of their journeys ; and, for the moment, their only effect as regarded myself was an increase of demonstration on the part of Sir James, to whom these temporary absences appeared to impart fresh passion ; and the presence of a hundred pretty and expensive toys which gradually accumulated about me, and of which he was the unwearied donor. I was never consulted upon any point ; and I was glad of it. I had taken up my position ; and I considered myself already a sufficient victim, without being required to assist in heaping the fuel for the funeral-pyre of my own happiness.


The season was about to commence, and we were preparing to leave Woodville, when my mother abruptly informed me that she had made every preparation for my marriage, which was to take place immediately after our arrival in town.

“ Sir James loves you too ardently, Eveleen,” she said in conclusion, “ to brook the idea of seeing

you made a mark for the idle attentions of a host of empty-hearted and empty-headed coxcombs ; nor need I remind you that you have yourself personal reasons for avoiding as much as possible any notoriety while you remain unmarried. As Lady Dornton you may defy all malicious comment."

Even at such a moment my mother could not show me mercy !

I retired to my room. For the last few weeks I had forgotten everything, save that I was about once more to enter the world ; and that, in all probability, I should again encounter Devereux. I felt that his presence might still give me strength to contend against the fate which had been forced upon me ; and, cowed as I was, while I despaired in myself, I had still a hope in him. My last prop was now torn away ! My destiny was accomplished. This new anguish did not, as all my previous trials had hitherto done, find a relief in tears. My eyes were hot and dry : my temples throbbed, and a suffocating sickness came over me. I had just strength to totter to the bell, to pull it violently, and to attempt to reach the sofa. I failed, however, in my purpose ; before I could cross the floor, I felt a heavy weight pressing upon my brain ; and, with one long, piercing shriek of terror and of pain, I fainted.



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For six weary weeks I remained stretched upon a bed of sickness. Hope and indignation had both failed at last, and I had sunk without their support. For days I was delirious, and called upon Devereux to deliver me from the torments to which I believed that my mother was wilfully subjecting me. At these periods my violence was frightful; and the extreme after-weakness consequent upon the physical efforts which I then made, reduced me to a state of helplessness impossible to describe. I could not even think; I only sought to remain undisturbed and unquestioned, and thus to be allowed to pass out of the world unconsciously.

When, for a brief space, my intellect returned, and that I ventured to open my eyes to the dim light which was admitted into the room, they invariably fell upon Dornton, who appeared never to move from his station near my pillow. For a considerable time the impropriety of this arrangement did not strike me; indeed my ideas still continued so confused, that even when I fixed my eyes upon him, I could not determine his identity. His extreme paleness, his melancholy expression, and the negligence of his dress, were all so unlike his former self, that I experienced no painful emotion on seeing him. His silence and his sadness were soothing to my depressed spirits and prostrated strength. The sight of him did not disturb me

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beside my sofa, a bunch of violets, or a cluster of wood-anemonies, and I saw by the sparkle which lit up the eye of Dornton as I eagerly stretched out my hand towards them, to whom I was indebted for this simple but welcome act of kindness.

The exactions of a long convalescence are more stringent than those of sickness itself. In the hour of physical suffering, resignation and obedience are all that are required of us, and even to these we are not always equal; but as the moral and mental powers regain their tone, and become conscious of the bodily thrall by which they are held back, they create a thousand wants and wishes which tyrannize by their multiplicity over the invalid; and an irritability which sets reason at defiance. Illness awakens the fears, and calls into action the sympathies of those about us—convalescence only wearies their good-will, and exhausts their patience. It is the real touchstone of affection.

Judged by this standard, Sir James was admirable. I could not form a rational wish which was not gratified on the instant; I could not express an annoyance for which he did not discover a remedy; he seemed to multiply himself in order to suffice to all my caprices; was constantly on the watch to save me from casual fatigue or agitation, and silenced my mother by a look, when, by her weariness,

ness of the task imposed upon her, she was disposed to impress upon me the extent of the sacrifice.

All this was very attractive—very hostile to the undying affection which I had vowed in my heart to Devereux. I no longer understood my own feelings. Dornton had become necessary to me. I began to reflect, not certainly with pleasure, but assuredly without terror, on my engagement to him. I even asked myself whether his continual assiduity and cheerfulness might not, perhaps, produce more home-happiness than the languid tenderness of Devereux; and the scale of feeling wavered with every new mark of affectionate attention which I received from him.

Such was the state of my mind when Sir James received a letter, which rendered it imperative that he should immediately proceed to Ireland. In the present day such a journey would be too unimportant and too speedily accomplished, to appear worthy of mention; but such was far from being the case at the time of which I am writing; and it was with a look of consternation that he placed the letter in my hand.

“Read it, Eveleen;” he said, in an unsteady voice; “and at least tell me that you pity me.”

I ran my eye rapidly over the paper, and then, glancing towards my mother, I strove to smile as I

replied ; “ I feel almost inclined to reserve my pity for myself.”

I had never anticipated that these few words would have produced so powerful an effect. I forgot, at the moment, how rarely I had suffered Dornton to perceive that he was essential even to my comfort ; I had received, not welcomed his attentions, and this admission of his importance to my happiness overwhelmed him with triumph.

“ Can you be sincere, Eveleen ?” he asked delightedly, as he seized my hand, and pressed it to his lips.

“ Do you believe that I am ungrateful for all your care ?” I asked in my turn.

“ And should you really miss me in my absence ?”

“ Really—and the rather that I know no one either able or willing to supply your place.”

“ Dare I then crave a boon in return for my poor services ?”

“ Assuredly, and if it be in my power to grant it, I will do so cheerfully.”

“ Will you pledge yourself to this ?”

“ Nay, now you are striving to alarm me ;” I said hurriedly, as a weight pressed upon my heart, and I felt my lip tremble ; “ name your desired reward, and I will tell you if it is in my power to bestow it.”

“It is in your power, and your power only ;” answered Sir James, as he bent his knee before me, and again possessed himself of my reluctant hand. “Eveleen, you can no longer doubt either the depth or the sincerity of my affection. After living so long constantly in your presence, this threatened separation seems to me worse than death. I can imagine but one consolation—but that one—oh, Eveleen, if you have ever felt the torture of doubt, the misery of absence, you will at once understand the fullness of the consolation which I would entreat.”

“I do not comprehend you,” I faltered out almost inaudibly.

“Is your heart indeed so mute, Eveleen ? Can it not prompt you to the truth ? Were you only mine before I depart on this hated journey—would you only consent to become indeed mine—my own—my wedded wife. Speak, Eveleen, *do* I indeed deserve so great a boon ?”

“It is a sorry jest, Sir James ;” I said, as soon as I could find breath for utterance ; “would you lead me from the death-bed to the altar without a pause ? Do I look like a bride, with this pale face, and this wasted form ? No more of this, Sir James, if you really wish to see me one day yours.”

“I dissent from you entirely, Eveleen,” said my mother, suddenly looking up from a book upon

which she had affected to be engaged ; “and I at once declare myself in Sir James’s favour. His proposal has, I frankly admit, relieved me from much embarrassment ; for I have not forgotten, although it appears to have escaped your own memory, the terms upon which you have now been living together for the last three months. Do you imagine that the world has made no comment upon the circumstance ? Do not deceive yourself. Your own absence during the season might not, perhaps, have been remarked ; but with Sir James Dornton it is otherwise. His project is not only rational, but in every way expedient.”

I could only bow my head, and weep.

“Let this wretched affair of Emily Vernon’s teach you more wisdom ;” pursued Lady Madelaine after a moment’s silence, which Sir James did not attempt to break ; “after wearing poor Mrs. Vernon to a shadow by making her drag her anxiety and her trouble from place to place, in order to ward off, if possible, an attack of what she quietly allowed her doctors to denominate consumption, she leaves as a bequest to her victimized mother the confession that she has died of a broken heart.”

“Died !” I exclaimed convulsively. “Is Emily Vernon indeed dead ?”

“She died at Nice, just as you were taken ill,” coldly replied Lady Madelaine ; “nor should I

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would enable me to judge, from the effect produced upon my feelings by his absence, of the actual state of my affections: and self-consoled by this argument, I gave another sincere sigh to the fate of poor Emily, and then resigned myself to sleep.

I was, however, a great deal too sanguine; for no later than the ensuing morning, it was again question of this hurried and ill-timed marriage. The subject was mooted by Sir James, followed up by my mother; and finally pressed upon me by Lord Otterford.

I have said little of the latter since his marriage, for, in truth, there had been little to say. The hand of Lady Madelaine had satisfied at once his passion and his ambition; and he had become a mere man of fashion, wasting his time on trifles; the best dresser, the best rider, and the least officious personage of his circle. The fashion and beauty of my mother flattered his vanity; and as he was too thoroughly conversant with her inborn egotism to have any fear that she would ever sacrifice her principles to a caprice, he left her perfectly free to avail herself as she pleased of both. Moreover, he was somewhat of a *bon vivant*, and an excellent judge of wine, and consequently exhibited a few symptoms of incipient gout, all which lowered him to the mere level of a worthy, well-bred, but by no means interesting personage.

Lord Otterford's salient quality had been his fascination, and his immense tact with "the sex ;" and as he forswore all gallantry after he became a husband, although he continued to be an agreeable companion, he no longer possessed any distinctive social feature. It is a melancholy fact that the ball-room butterflies who commence life as "ladies' men," commonly close it as mere human nonentities. And it was only now—now when he had ceased all effort to render himself attractive—that the punishment of his former falsehood had come upon him—now, when the charms of the woman whom he had so long coveted had paled beneath long custom and companionship, that the vision of the fond girl who had loved him—who had trusted him—and who had died when that love became a crime, was brought against him in all its purity ; and that conscience, when it rose before him, pointed with a rigid finger to her bier, and whispered that the ruin was *his* work.

In spite of the affection which I had felt for the unfortunate Emily, of the distaste which I had nourished of himself, and of my own better reason, I pitied him. He was evidently stricken to the soul, and wounded even in the midst of his self-indulgence. I alone suspected the cause of his depression ; and he was so well aware that to me it could not long be a mystery, that his eye sunk

before mine whenever I addressed him ; and he scrupulously avoided on his part all further intercourse, than that trivial exchange of courtesies exacted by good breeding.

It was, consequently, with some surprise that I now heard him support the arguments of Dornton. He represented to me the useless cruelty of exposing the man to whom I was affianced, to the unceasing anxieties, and doubts, and apprehensions, by which he must necessarily be tormented, during an absence so little anticipated at such a moment ; but there was no violence, no bitterness in his reasoning. He admitted the rationality of my objections, although he would not allow them to be of sufficient weight to counterbalance the arguments by which they were opposed. He brought before me the debt of gratitude which I had contracted—the untiring devotion of which I had been the object—the fact that I had received Sir James as a suitor—and, above all, that the period originally named by my mother for our union had long passed ; and all these tangible circumstances were rendered more prominent, and more embarrassing, by the tender entreaties of Sir James, who, on his knee before me, protested that he would never rise from his position until I had consented to his happiness.

This painful and fatiguing scene endured so long

that my strength gave way under the excitement. I pressed my hand to my forehead, which was throbbing almost to agony. "Be generous, Sir James;" I said at last; "you know that I am unequal to this trial. How can you ask me to become your wife under such circumstances? The very movement which such an event must create about me, would in all probability plunge me once more into the fearful state of suffering and alienation from which I have only just escaped."

"All this, and more, has been alike anticipated and prevented, dearest Eveleen;" interposed Sir James, as he pressed my hand to his lips and to his heart; "three days hence I must commence my journey; and, until the moment of my departure, I will not ask you to ratify my happiness. Lady Madelaine consents that the ceremony shall be performed here, in the saloon; she has already secured a promise that a special license shall be prepared against the moment in which I go to claim it; let me but call you my wife; but have the right once to clasp you to my heart before I am separated from you; and I will depart by the mail which passes Woodville in the evening, full of security in the present, and of trust and confidence in the future."

I listened breathlessly; and I instantly understood that all further opposition would be worse

than useless. Every thing had been pre-arranged and pre-decided. I had only to fulfil my destiny. What chance of successful competition remained to me? How could I, poor, timid, irresolute being as I was, oppose the indomitable will of a Lady Madelaine? or the passionate entreaties of a man who had for months devoted himself to my caprices?

I feel that, even now, I am endeavouring to excuse my weakness; as though the reader could not detect, in every detail of my life, the want of moral courage which made me alike the tool and the victim of every will with which my own came into contact! Enough that, as may have been foreseen, I yielded. Weary of resistance, bewildered by the arguments advanced, anxious to escape by any means from the persecution to which I was subjected; wilfully shutting my eyes to the fact, that, in order to spare myself present suffering, I was sacrificing by one word all possibility of future freedom, I at length murmured out my consent, in a voice trembling with terror and agitation.

“But remember,” I said, breaking in upon the rapturous acknowledgment of my transported suitor, whose exhibition of ungovernable rapture was to me as fatiguing as his previous pertinacity; “remember, Sir James, that if I fulfil in good faith the promise which you have extorted from me, I expect no less from yourself.”

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CHAPTER XVII.

Never was there so melancholy a festival as my marriage ! The rector of the parish performed the ceremony, and his daughter officiated as my bride-maid. My simple morning dress of white muslin was half hidden beneath the folds of a superb shawl of Indian cachemire, the gift of Sir James, and the only article of any value which I wore. Joséphine almost scolded herself into a fever for weeks afterwards, whenever an allusion was made to the circumstance, while to myself it was a subject of the most utter indifference. Pale, depressed, and reckless, I must have looked to the worthy rector and his daughter, and an official-looking personage, who was presented to me as Mr. Thornton, when I entered the saloon leaning upon the arm of Lord Otterford, who had stationed himself at the door of my dressing-room, for the purpose of offering himself as my escort, more like a spectre than a bride. Sir James and my mother

were already doing the honours to our reverend guest, and his pretty, happy-looking daughter; who, all blushes, smiles, and tremour, did not appear to the last thoroughly to understand how her present important office had devolved upon her.

I had been so painfully absorbed by my own fears and reflections, regrets and bewilderment, that I had taken no part whatever in the scanty preparations which were made for the marriage; and, consequently, when Dornton approached me, and placed a small casket in my hand, requesting me, in a suppressed voice, to present it to Miss Grenvel, I did so mechanically, with as cheerful a smile as I could summon to my lips; nor did I take the slightest interest in the action to which I had been prompted, until I was aroused from my state of moral lethargy by the delighted comments of the happy girl, who was soon occupied in adorning herself with the pearls which it had contained.

I looked at her in wonder and in envy. I had never known the joy which such a gift could produce, upon one unaccustomed to the costly toys which form a necessary portion of the existence of the wealthy and the idle; and, as she stood before a glass, arranging her newly-acquired treasures upon her person, I lingered over her glowing cheeks, her sparkling eyes, and her low, self-gratulatory

expressions of wondering admiration ; while I felt the tears rise painfully to my own hot and weary eyeballs, and glanced at my pale cheeks, my bending form, and my look of hopeless melancholy. Strange to say, I was calm, perfectly calm. My pulse beat steadily, and there was not a quiver on my lips. I had exhausted all violent emotion within the last two days. I had wept, and knelt, and wrestled with my misery ; and I had sunk under the fatigue of so unequal a contest. I scarcely knew myself. I had no longer either a hope or a fear ; I was simply passive.

Lady Madelaine was magnificently attired, and both Lord Otterford and Sir James were in full dress ; but no attempt had been made on the part of my mother to induce me to exchange my simple wrapping gown and close cap, for a costume more befitting the occasion. Content to carry out her great project, she affected to overlook all minor points ; she had cleverly avoided subjecting me to any preliminary fatigue ; and thus husbanded my strength and energies for the eventful moment which was to make me the wife of her *protégé*. Her smile was radiant. Her triumph made her carriage almost regal. I watched *her* also ; and felt a sort of vague astonishment that those around me should be so cheerful and so brilliant, when I was sad and faded.

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parchment was spread before me, and the proper spot cautiously indicated by the lawyer, I wrote my name without comment or hesitation ; after which Sir James, my mother, and Lord Otterford followed my example.

This done, a brief and desultory conversation ensued ; and, at its close, the whole party moved towards the spot where the rector had already taken up his station. There was a certain solemnity in the arrangement. I walked first, supported on the arm of my father-in-law ; Lady Madelaine followed with Sir James ; and Miss Grenval closed the procession under the escort of Mr. Thornton. My heart beat quickly for an instant, as I found myself kneeling beside my future husband ; and a giddiness came upon me, which rendered me almost unconscious of what was passing before me, and of the scene in which I was an actor.

The ceremony was soon over. The servants, who had been admitted to the entrance of the saloon, disappeared ; the folding-doors, which opened upon Lord Otterford's private room, were flung back ; and Mr. Grenval had the happiness of handing Lady Madelaine to a table covered with a profusion of gastronomical luxuries. Sir James, happy and triumphant, supported me to the seat which had been assigned to me ; and the pretty

daughter of the rector followed on the arm of Lord Otterford. It was fortunate that the amiable divine possessed unwearied animal spirits, and a benevolence equally untiring, or our breakfast would have passed entirely in pantomime. Lady Madelaine was too full of self-exultation to be loquacious; and Lord Otterford made no effort to throw off the languor by which he was oppressed; while Sir James neither looked at nor spoke to any person but myself, save in monosyllables; and my solitary bridemaid was evidently dying to escape, in order to pour forth her delight to her family.

As everything must terminate, however, sooner or later, so our weary breakfast at length came to a close; and I believe that every individual of the party, not even excepting the worthy and amiable rector, felt glad of the release. Although the good clergyman had put a cheerful face upon the business, it was nevertheless evident that he suspected some mystery, of which he easily understood that I was the passive victim; and there was a fatherly interest in his look, and a kindness in his accents, when he took leave of me, by which I was much more touched than by the renewed congratulations which he doubtlessly considered it expedient and correct to offer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

We were no sooner alone than Lady Madelaine, instead of retiring to her dressing-room as I had anticipated, and thus affording me a pretext to retire also, caused her fauteuil to be drawn nearer to the fire, and seated herself in all the glory of her brocade and jewels. I was about to make an effort to escape, nevertheless ; but her first words arrested me, and I was compelled to resume my seat.

“ Do not attempt to retire, Eveleen ;” she said firmly, although the smile which she had called up was intended to make the address somewhat less dictatorial ; “ we have an immensity of business to arrange, and our time is sadly limited. Although it is very easy for Miss Tilden and Sir James Dornton to get quietly married over a drawing-room fire, they cannot re-enter the world with the same absence of ceremony ; and consequently certain arrangements must be made, and certain

plans judiciously carried out, in order that the exigencies of society may be properly complied with. Now these, Eveleen, you cannot, either in your character of bride—or, for the moment if you will, widow—arrange, combine, or overlook in your own proper person; and I have therefore proposed to Sir James to take these matters into my own hands, and to spare both you and himself all anxiety and fatigue.”

I bowed my thanks. I felt no interest whatever in the arrangements to which my mother alluded, nor did I ask a question. I was pining to be alone. She paused for a moment, as if awaiting my reply; but, finding that I continued silent, she resumed: “In order to do this, I must, of course, leave Woodville, and this fact has occasioned great uneasiness to Sir James. Obligated as he is to absent himself this evening, he has ventured to take measures to prevent your temporary isolation, which he trusts will not prove disagreeable to you.”

For the first time, I listened attentively. I felt that the eyes of Dornton were riveted upon me, and that it was necessary I should say something.

“Whatever your ladyship and Sir James have decided, I am prepared to approve,” I said coldly.

“Spoken like the very model of a wife!” exclaimed my mother, with a laugh, which was not

altogether one of gaiety. "Our minds are then relieved at once. You are too young and too pretty, Eveleen, to dispense with proper protection. I would not propose Lady Flora, for I knew that you had already enjoyed her society to satiety; and, as my taste does not lead me to cultivate the affections of elderly ladies in general, I was fairly at fault, and could not remove the difficulty. Sir James was, however, more fortunate; and, as you have given us *carte blanche* to act as we deem best, I am delighted to think that, during our compulsory absence, we shall have the satisfaction of feeling that we have left you under the guardianship of so unexceptionable a person as your husband's aunt!"

My husband! How the words jarred upon my nerves!

"Do you consent, my sweet Eveleen?" murmured Sir James.

"If it be your wish;" I replied languidly; "and that your relative will consent to become the inmate of so dull a house, and the companion of so sad and —" I was about to add—"desolate a being;" but I checked myself, and only terminated the sentence by my tears.

Dornton rose hurriedly from his chair, and began to curse the fate which compelled him to his odious journey; I witnessed his emotion with indifference, for I knew that go he must, and I only

sighed for the moment of his departure. I was extenuated with fatigue, exertion, and misery. All that I wanted was solitude—absolute, unbroken solitude. I wanted to think, to breathe, and to suffer in freedom.

The events of the last few days had succeeded each other with a rapidity that had left me no time to reflect upon their overwhelming effect upon myself, or to look deliberately and calmly upon my present position and my future prospects. Alas! that future—what could I hope from it? I had never, upon one point, deceived myself for a moment; I did not love the man to whom I had given my hand; I did not believe it possible that I should ever do so. My vanity was flattered by his adoration, and my gratitude had been excited by his watchful tenderness during my convalescence. I well knew, however, that this was all—that he had no other hold upon my heart. How, then, could I look into the future with hope, or even with tranquillity? I had seen enough of Sir James Dornton to be convinced, that in marrying him I was not about to become the wife of a man who, like Lord Otterford, would subside into a mere domestic husband. The world—the great world—the world of fashion, and dissipation, and luxury, was the only atmosphere in which he could long breathe freely. This was indeed the same world of which I had dreamt so fondly from my

girlhood—but not the guide who was to pilot me through its mazes. The charm with which I had then invested it was gone ; and, as I at that moment believed, gone for ever.

I will dwell no longer on the memory of my marriage-day. The dinner was a counterpart of the breakfast, save that while it lasted Sir James did not attempt to sustain anything like a conversation even with me. His eyes scarcely ever wandered from my face ; he did not even affect to eat, but he drank wine in a manner quite unusual with him. My mother talked of town ; of the *fêtes* which she proposed to give, and the *artistes* whom she meant to patronize ; affected occasionally to address me as Lady Dornton ; and ultimately succeeded in depriving me of the slight degree of energy which I had hitherto preserved.

The consequence of this utter prostration was, however, a fortunate one ; for when a servant at length announced the arrival of the mail which was awaiting Sir James at the park gate, and that I saw him hastily spring from his seat and approach me, I gave one suffocating sob, and fainted.

I afterwards learnt that it required all the authority of Lady Madelaine to compel him to quit my side ; but the necessity for his absence was so stringent, that he had no alternative save obedience. As for myself, when I again became

conscious at once of existence and of suffering, I opened my aching eyes in my own quiet apartment, where, by the faint light of a night-lamp, I saw Joséphine and my old nurse watching beside my pillow. Such was the realization of the glittering and romantic picture which I had been used to draw of my wedding-day.

Restored to myself by the departure of Dornton, I was still unable to overcome the fearful lethargy which had taken possession of me. Feelings and events alike were so confused and untangible, that I could neither separate nor retain them. I was just in the position of the man whom Plato, in one of his undying dialogues, supposes to have been imprisoned in a cavern, with his back towards the light, where he could distinguish nothing save the shadows of men passing and repassing on the wall before him. My head was perplexed—my marriage seemed to be a dream; but, nevertheless, a sense of restraint was strong upon me. I no longer felt free even to look into my own heart. It was a waking nightmare.

Had I ever experienced the wish to feel grateful to Lady Madelaine for the gratuitous offer which she had made of sparing me the exertion of undertaking any arrangements for the future, it would have been impossible to do so, when, during the three days which intervened between the departure

of Dornton and the arrival of his aunt, she permitted me, without scruple, to see at what an expence, both of temper and of patience, she compelled herself to remain at Woodville in order to receive her, and to preserve at least the semblance of an interest in my comfort. The season had long commenced; she was now untrammelled; my sacrifice had purchased her freedom, at least until she should summon Adela to her side; an event which I scarcely anticipated, although I could not explain upon what plea she could much longer keep her in banishment. No wonder that Lady Madeleine pined to escape from a sick room and a deserted saloon.

I scarcely gave a thought to the new companion who had been provided for me. So long as Sir James continued absent, I cared not who filled his place: I was content. It was not, however, with utter indifference that I heard my mother, on one of the rare occasions when we were seated quietly together—she languidly employed at her embroidery frame, and I lying back, half dreaming, upon my sofa—commence a conversation, of which the expected stranger was the subject.

“I trust that this Miss Dornton will prove endurable. I have such a horror of old maids, that I quite dread the time which I must spend under the same roof with her.”

“ Poor lady !” I replied, without unclosing my eyes ; “ she has more reason to shrink from the prospect of becoming my inmate. Your ladyship’s torture will be brief ; what you number by hours she may, probably, count by weeks.”

“ The thing will bear no comparison, Evelcen, and is too absurd. Miss Dornton is in narrow circumstances, and has for many years been residing in a country town ; where, too proud of her ancient descent to associate with the petty gentry about her, and too poor to keep up her connection with the neighbourhood, she has lived the life of a recluse.”

I sighed, and the sigh was one of envy. The woman of whom my mother was speaking so disdainfully was free.

“ Moreover,” continued Lady Madelaine in the same tone of easy superiority, “ will it not be an event in her existence to become domesticated with Lady Dornton ? You really know so little of the world, Eveleen, that you do not make a proper distinction, even in a case in which you are yourself interested ; and it is, perhaps, necessary that I should hint to you, in consequence, the propriety of asserting your own dignity with Miss Dornton. There is no set of persons on earth so encroaching, where their advances are tolerated, as poor relations.”

I thought of Lady Flora, but I made no comment on my mother's words.

"I wish, at all events, that she would arrive;" again she resumed pettishly: "she might certainly have been here before this. It is ill-bred and presuming on her part to make so much unnecessary delay."

"She does not, in all probability, suspect that your ladyship is in such haste to leave Woodville."

"Is that an epigram, Lady Dornton?"

"I am in no mood for epigrams: I simply gave utterance to my thought."

"In that case, I shall merely remark, that if the lady in question has forgotten herself so far as to speculate upon my movements, she is too ready to identify herself with the family into which her nephew has married."

"The fault is mine, madam;" I said somewhat impatiently, for the insolent egotism of my mother jarred upon my feelings, bowed down as I was alike by the past and by the present; "pray do not suffer me involuntarily to prejudice you against her. It was an idle suggestion, and one which I had, perhaps, no right to express. You must forgive me, for I am ill and sick at heart, and scarcely am aware of the exact purport of the words I utter."

"Ill and sick at heart!" echoed Lady Madeline, as though she had not every reason in the

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What that topic might have been, I was destined never to know ; for at that very moment a carriage passed under the window, which we each felt must contain the expected guest. For one moment my heart beat quick. Was I about to meet a friend or a jailor ?

The door was thrown open by a servant, Miss Dornton was announced, and she immediately entered, leaning upon the arm of Lord Otterford, who had assisted her to alight. My mother curtsied coldly and in silence, and then resumed her seat ; while the look of surprise which I detected upon the countenance of the visitor hastened the movement which I was making to rise and receive her. Her first embarrassment over, Miss Dornton glanced from Lady Madelaine to myself ; and immediately that she met the smile and the outstretched hand with which I was slowly approaching, she turned rapidly to welcome both ; and then gently seated me once more among my cushions, and placed herself beside me.

“ How shall I thank you, madam ”—I commenced ; but Lady Madelaine interposed.

“ Miss Dornton will be kind enough to excuse your exerting yourself, Eveleen ; she is already aware that you are an invalid, and that you remain in the country only because quiet has been prescribed for you. You must not imagine, madam,

that Lady Dornton is naturally either valetudinarian or melancholy—quite the reverse ; but she has had a very severe illness, and is still suffering considerably from weakness.”

“ Poor young creature ! ” was the kind-hearted rejoinder ; “ her marriage at such a moment must have been a great trial to her, and the absence of Sir James have made it doubly painful.”

My mother coughed a little high-bred cough, which superseded the necessity of a reply.

“ I trust that you have not suffered from your journey ; ” I said hastily, not well knowing how to frame an answer to her remark.

“ You remind me, Eveleen, that we have been inhospitably forgetful ; ” again broke in Lady Madeline ; “ Miss Dornton will necessarily require both refreshment and repose. Lord Otterford, the bell, if you please. Miss Dornton will find every thing provided in her dressing-room.”

The well-bred old lady at once understood the motive of my mother, and rose. Joséphine was summoned to conduct her to her apartment, and our first interview was over.

CHAPTER XIX.

On the following morning Lord Otterford and my mother departed. I saw them abandon me without a sigh ; nor do I believe that their hasty disappearance caused one regret to my new guest.

Miss Dornton was very diminutive in stature, but had evidently been a pretty woman in her time. Her figure was still smart and well preserved ; and there was a shrewdness in the expression of her countenance which gave assurance of the vivacity of her intellect, even tempered as it was by the benevolence which evidently formed the prominent feature of her character. She was the very perfection of fastidious and somewhat pedantic neatness. Her dress was rich, but somewhat scrupulously plain ; and it formed no bad type of her moral nature. She was full of good, strong sense and womanly sympathy, but she possessed neither sentiment nor imagination. For the tangible sufferings which she could see and comprehend, she had always a tear or a word

of pity ; but for those which grew out of either moral and mental struggles she was impracticable and callous. She could understand a headache or a fainting-fit, but she could never attribute them to any thing deeper than a mere physical cause.

Like all persons long accustomed to live alone, she was very taciturn and self-centred, pious, and occupied. She could better have dispensed with her shadow than her work-basket ; and did not appear to have settled herself comfortably until she had ascertained the distance of Woodville from the parish church, the name of the rector, and the hours of the services. She was evidently a worthy, kind-hearted old lady ; but, as regarded companionship, Sir James might with equal propriety have provided me with the portrait of one of his female ancestors.

I did not, however, regret this fact ; Miss Dorn-ton answered the purpose for which she was intended admirably. Her protection was unexceptionable for myself, and liberated my mother from an ungrateful duty, ungraciously performed. Well-bred, unassuming, and self-centred, she was the very antipodes of Lady Flora ; and I was rejoiced that her taciturn habits enabled me to indulge in my own reflections without any solecism in civility.

It was not until I had been for several days do-

mesticated with the meek old lady, and become satisfied that I should meet with no interference from her in any way, that I began seriously to understand my real position. The undefined feeling with which Sir James had inspired me, the blended gratitude and admiration which, in his best moments, he had awakened in my heart, required his perpetual presence to insure its duration. While he soothed my hours of pain, and beguiled those of lassitude, I leaned upon him for support and companionship ; but, as during his absence, these failed, so his charm failed with them. How different was this pale and borrowed light from the enduring flame which Devereux had kindled in my spirit ! Circumstances had, indeed, somewhat quenched it, but it still existed ; and might, as I was compelled to acknowledge to myself, be but too easily re-illumed. I dwelt upon all that had passed between us ; I recalled his every look, his every word, and his every gesture, during our short but eventful interview near the Wood Lodge ; I made a few faint struggles to resist these dangerous memories, but I was too weak in purpose to wage successful war against my own heart.

This wrestling of affection against duty recurred so constantly, and created so painful a degree of depression, that it was a continual obstacle to the re-establishment of my health. I was conscious

at last that a less patient and considerate companion than Miss Dornton would have been desirable for me at such a crisis. She, poor lady, satisfied of the enviable fate of the woman who had secured so unexceptionable a husband as her nephew, never looked beneath the surface for a hidden evil; she never dreamed of that sickness of the mind by which the body withers; and so long as I punctually and obediently swallowed the drugs prescribed for me by my physician, she felt no further responsibility.

In my healthier moments I made a resolution to emancipate myself from the trammels of my own emotion, but I was soon compelled to own that I was powerless without assistance. In this dilemma my thoughts once again recurred to Adela. The hurry of my marriage had rendered it impossible that she should be present; nor, indeed, trusting to the last that I should be able to escape an union with Sir James, had I urged Lady Madelaine to summon her. Consequently, I felt myself to be blameless as regarded this apparent neglect; and, as I imagined that now I had irrevocably sacrificed myself to my mother's will, she could have no pretext for refusing to me the society of my sister, at least while I remained in the country, I pondered over the idea until I became sincerely and earnestly anxious to see it realized. Miss Dornton, to whom I communicated

my wish, appeared to be annoyed at the suggestion ; but as she gave no reason for her objection, I resolved upon following out my project without any further appeal to her authority. She was probably jealous that I should prefer the society of my own sister to that of my husband's kinswoman, and the companionship of a younger person than herself. It was a little weakness for which I readily forgave her, but which it was needless to indulge.

The result of my deliberations was the following letter to Adela. It cost me some resolution, for I remembered the ill-success of my last missive ; but I resolved to persevere.

“ I have changed my name, my dear Adela, and I hope that the one which I now bear will ensure the happiness of my life ; but all is, as yet, mere speculation. The absence of Sir James, on business connected with some Irish property, makes me dull enough, and renders my recovery very slow. Come, and help me to regain alike my health and spirits, my dear sister. It will be a charitable act, for which I shall be most grateful. The pleasure of seeing you beside me will make me forget that I ought to wish for the presence of another.”

This letter, short as it was, had cost me some study, and I looked upon it as a sublime effort of

courage. My heart had assuredly little to do with the expressions which it contained on the subject of Sir James ; but my pride was roused, and I piqued myself upon the manifestation of a little heroism, which might serve to secure me against the comments of my sister ; while I did not doubt that Adela, glad at any price to escape from the tedium of Rooksley, would not hesitate to procure Lady Madelaine's consent to so simple and natural an arrangement.

Several days passed by before I received any reply, but, as I had calculated that such must inevitably be the case, I waited as patiently as I could. At length two letters were delivered to me, of which one was from my mother, and the other from Adela. I tore open the latter with a beating heart. These were its contents.

“ Dear Eveleen,

“ I had been informed of your marriage, but was ignorant alike of your own feelings, and of those of Sir James. He doubtlessly loves you, as you talk of anticipated happiness. Enjoy so agreeable a prospect : I shall take more interest in its realization than you may, perhaps, feel inclined to believe. I can do no more. I should be the worst person in the world as your physician, either in mind or body. We so seldom think alike, and

we, in all cases, act so differently, that I should be more likely to trouble your new-made felicity than to increase it."

My mother simply ratified in her note the refusal of Adela. She had, as she declared, left her free to act as she saw fit, when my invitation was communicated to her by my sister; believing, after the reluctance which Adela had expressed to becoming my guest, that she should do me no kindness by attempting to overcome what was evidently a rooted repugnance.

And this was all; and I sat for a time lost in conjectures before these two cold, concise, and matter-of-fact epistles. To what cause was I to attribute so heartless an abandonment on the part of my only sister? That we had never either felt or professed an overweening affection the one for the other was undoubtedly true, but this was, under the circumstances, a proceeding on the part of Adela, which almost betrayed aversion. I feverishly searched into the very recesses of my heart to discover, if possible, its cause. I well knew that my sister's feelings were extreme in all things; and, eventually, with a burning brow and a throbbing pulse, I decided that she had sought to manifest, in this cutting letter, her contemptuous censure of my infidelity to Devereux, and in her

refusal to visit me—an unequivocal demonstration of her disdain.

The witness of their own conscience never suffices to the weak-minded ; they require, in order to sustain themselves in their own eyes, and to retain their self-esteem, the approbation of others, especially of those decided and indomitable spirits who compel their respect. . This was precisely the position in which I then found myself. I acknowledged the supremacy of her moral strength, and I required its support to pillow my own weakness—its fiat to justify my own acts.

Humbled and ashamed, I never sought for a moment to discover a counter argument with which to combat the opinion that I believed her to have adopted. On the contrary, I once more wept over my cowardice—my everlasting custom when, by my own weakness, I had plunged myself into difficulty. The little edifice of virtue and duty, frail as it was, which I had occasionally striven to build up, was overthrown at once. I no longer sought to excuse myself, upon the plea of either gratitude to Sir James, or filial obedience to Lady Madelaine. I flung all such arguments to the winds as idle sophistries ; and for a time dared to think that the heart could not, and should not, be controlled. I shuddered, but I clung to my dangerous theory. I saw the precipice at my feet ; but I scorned to retreat a step !

So unwholesome a state of mind could not, however, endure long in a nature as yet undepraved. The storm of passion swept over me, and I saw my future path of life overstrewn by the fragments of past peace which it had rent away in its progress ; but I felt grateful that I could look upon them without positive remorse, and I glorified myself on the conviction. Alas ! had I, in that hour of returning reason, only known WHERE to turn for real comfort, how much after-suffering would have been spared to me ! But I have already confessed that of pure, humble-minded, heaven-trusting religion I knew nothing. I sought for strength in myself, where I never found it ; and virtue in my own heart, which was as unstable as water.

The terror of my sister's sarcasms aroused my temper. I began to ask myself why I should defer to the judgment of a mere girl, who only reasoned upon theory, and who knew nothing of the world which she professed to scorn, or of the feelings which she affected to analyse and to control ? I could not, however, cheat myself in this way ; as my anger subsided, my fears returned. My mind was mastered by that of Adela.

It seemed to me that if I could only induce her to listen to me ; if I could only explain to her my reluctance, my opposition ; if I could only tell her of all my tears, all my beseechings, my physical

weakness and my mental fatigue, she would sympathize with my sacrifice, rather than blame me; but while I enumerated all my past struggles, and invoked their memories, I forgot that I was undermining my own peace, and assuming the attitude of a victim, when I should be endeavouring to gather strength for the performance of the new and imperative duties which had grown up about me. In a mental effort to justify myself in the eyes of another, I was rendering myself more faulty in my own.

And while all this tumult was warring within me, Miss Dornton sat by my side as calm and passionless as an automaton. There was something fearfully irritating in the ceaseless motion of the knitting-needles which she scarcely ever laid aside. I have watched them at times until I have with difficulty suppressed a groan. We were together for weeks; and had she only once changed the aspect of the labour upon which they were employed, I could have supported even them with something like philosophy; but this poor relief, trifling as it was, never came; she was engaged upon a measureless length of what I think she called fringe; and with which she had a horrid vision of garnishing some old-world piece of furniture which had belonged to her grandmother. I never inquired what it was; but it appeared to me that its dimensions must be

somewhat on a par with the limits of Salisbury Plain.

Let those laugh who will at this digression ; but let them at the same time be assured that petty and perpetual annoyances, such as these, are to the suffering spirit what the rose-leaf was to the vase of water—the trifle which causes them to overflow !

Thus time crept on. The dreary, cheerless, leafless winter had robbed even Woodville of its charms. The lake was frozen beneath the windows ; the birds were silent among the boughs ; the rare shrubs and plants which, during the months of sunshine, made the grounds almost rival in their gorgeousness and variety the rich profusion of the tropics, were removed to the conservatories, or huddled beneath matting. To find beauties amid such a scene, the inmate should possess a light heart. To the unhappy, a winter of solitude is a mere season of suffering. To me this withering of nature was morally unwholesome. It appeared to sympathize in my hypochondriacism, and to encourage my mental lethargy. I would have given all the splendid and useless toys by which I was surrounded, and which seemed to mock the abandonment of friends and relatives, for one cluster of wild roses, or one bunch of violets.

Even a winter with Miss Dornton, however, could not last for ever. The spring came at length ; I

could again wander unattended through the shrubberies, and indulge in dreams of the future which were never likely to be realized. Sir James had not explained to me the nature of the business which had detained him so long in Ireland. His long and eloquent letters were filled by passionate regrets and enthusiastic anticipations. I have hitherto made no allusion to our correspondence, simply because it jarred upon the train of feeling to which I had habituated myself. Each letter that I received broke upon my spirit like a discordant note upon the ear; and it was well that I at once decided upon answering these matrimonial epistles at the very moment of their receipt, while the influence of Dornton's harmonious and tender periods was still strong upon me, or I know not how I should ever have accomplished so difficult a task.

Thus, as I before remarked, I was in perfect ignorance of the causes which compelled Sir James to so prolonged an absence; while I was so well satisfied with their effects, that I did not care to ascertain their nature. I was still weak, and thin, and pale; and both my vanity and my indolence found their profit in the solitary existence which I was leading. The London season was, however, no sooner at an end, than Lady Madelaine hastened on the wings of maternal tenderness to the retreat of her invalid daughter; but it was to me a conso-

lation to reflect, in my moments of bitterness, that the sacrifice was considerably lessened by the fact that she brought in her train a score of dear friends, all anxious, like herself, to replace the noise and smoke of town by the luxurious *villegiatura* of a well-appointed country-house.

Had I been weighed down by no latent grief, it is possible that nothing would have been more agreeable for me than the movement of the gay and reckless crowd by which I was suddenly surrounded ; but their hollow and heartless trifling offered no remedy to my diseased and unsettled mind. At first I found it difficult to sustain so extreme a change. I was compelled to restrain my tears, to stifle my sighs, and to appear as free from care and from anxiety as themselves. I had not forgotten the indifference with which Lady Madelaine had made my love for Devereux the common theme of herself and her associates ; and, thanks to the comments of these same individuals upon others of their acquaintance, I required no prompting to understand at once how much my peculiar position placed me in their power. I knew that, married while yet a mere girl, and contrary to my own inclinations, I should be an object of curiosity and speculation to all the high-born idlers among whom I was thus thrown into constant companionship ; that I should be scrutinized, and criticized, and not always in the

kindest spirit ; and that I must keep an incessant watch, not only over my words and actions, but over my very thoughts.

Fortunately the constraint which I deprecated proved salutary to me ; by dint of endeavouring to delude others, I ended by deceiving myself ; by doubting if I had not exaggerated my trials ; and whether dissipation and self-indulgence might not overcome the vapours by which I had so long suffered myself to be oppressed.

I resolved to solve the problem, and I succeeded. My melancholy would have experienced no sympathy ; my satisfied vanity and ready partnership in pleasure made me welcome to every one. I became gradually less inclined, even when alone, to indulge in those long fits of weeping which dimmed my eyes and clouded my complexion ; I found myself speculating upon my probable success in such or such a dress ; endeavouring to recall certain words and looks of admiration which had been directed towards me during the preceding day ; in short, although I occasionally sighed, partly from real regret, and partly from long-acquired habit, my woman-nature was once more thoroughly aroused ; and although I am quite sure that I never should have been induced to make the acknowledgment, I was comparatively happy. The image of Devereux was not obliterated, but it had

become much less distinct. The letters of Sir James were no longer a mere matter of course, but a necessary ingredient of my existence. They were filled with comments upon my own beauty and attractions ; and they kept my vanity, and consequently my amiability, at the culminating point. On their receipt I regularly communicated them to Lady Madelaine ; not from any principle of deference or duty ; I do not wish to affect a virtue which I did not possess, but in order that she might see and understand the price at which my personal merits were held by the husband upon whom she had compelled me to bestow them.

My good-humour returned ; my accomplishments were once more exerted for the amusement of my mother's guests ; I was declared to be more charming than ever, and Sir James the happiest of men, who could never be sufficiently grateful for the concession I had made. All this was charming. Lady Madelaine, adopting the tone of her company, was kind, and even confidential ; Lord Otterford gallant and attentive. I was the lion of the house. No wonder that I rapidly regained my health, and, as a natural consequence, the freshness and beauty of which my previous languor had deprived me.

CHAPTER XX.

I was awakened one morning by the unusually abrupt entrance of Joséphine.

“ You have disturbed me ;” I said somewhat impatiently ; “ are there any letters ?”

“ No, miladi,” answered the soubrette, unmoved by my pettishness ; “ but Sir James has just arrived, and I thought it my duty to inform miladi at once.”

I ought not to have felt surprised ; he had already informed me of the period of his return, but the effect of her words was painful. My feelings were so contradictory, so various, that I could not disentangle them. I tried to believe that I rejoiced at his advent ; it terminated my singular state of bridal widowhood, and emancipated me altogether from my mother’s authority ; but still I could not conceal from myself that I had wilfully closed my eyes to its occurrence, and would gladly have deferred it. Fortunately for me, Lady Made-

laine, conscious of the part which she had acted, suspected something of the truth, and contrived that I should have ample time to recover my self-possession.

My first meeting with Dornton took place in my dressing-room. He was all rapture and affection. He had succeeded perfectly in the business which took him to Ireland; and only returned, as he declared, to find me a thousand times more lovely than when we parted. My mother soon broke in upon our interview; she had never been more welcome. She congratulated Sir James upon the recovery of a property supposed to be lost to him; insisted upon his thanks for the care which she had taken of his melancholy little wife; and finally regretted that the influx of visitors at Woodville had driven away Miss Dornton; who departed to her country lodging, laden with a costly diamond ring, upon which she evidently set not the slightest value, and an embrace as cold as the jewel. I parted from her, as I had met her, without a sigh.

I was somewhat startled to hear that a large party were to meet at Woodville that very day, in honour of Dornton's return, when our marriage was to be publicly announced. The intelligence was evidently welcome to him; but it was far less so to me. After the agitation occasioned by his return, I should have preferred the comparative

quiet of our home-circle. There was, however, no alternative, and I accordingly submitted with the best grace I could assume ; only stipulating that, until the dinner-bell had rung, I should be permitted to remain undisturbed in my own apartments. As this arrangement also excluded Sir James, I had to combat for awhile his lover-like expostulations ; but, as Lady Madelaine, anxious that I should appear to advantage, which she well knew could not be the case if my temper were too sorely tried, condescended to second my wishes, I soon dismissed him to the guests, and sat down to ponder in solitude over the trying position in which I was about to be placed, before the unsympathizing circle which had been gathered together at Woodville.

The first person upon whom my eyes fell, as I entered the dining-room on the arm of Sir James, was Mr. Curties ; and I felt confused and disconcerted as he advanced to greet me. My delicacy was, however, palpably mistimed, for the worthy member for —— was as calm, as stiff, and as rectangular as ever. He even smiled, as he glanced from me to Dornton, and uttered a few words of congratulation. I was lost in amazement ! I did not possess the solution of the riddle, and I was deeply mortified. This man, according to Lady Madelaine, had loved me, or, at least, had been

dazzled by my attractions, and under the influence of such feelings had sought my hand, and been rejected; yet now, only a few months later, as if to convince me of the transitory effect of my personal merits, he met me as another's bride, with a smile about his lips, and a compliment upon his tongue. What a lesson did this appear to be to my vanity and self-love!

The annoyance was, however, soon forgotten in the flattering comments and congratulations of the other guests, among whom I was glad to remark the good rector and his pretty daughter, who was duly adorned with her bridal pearls. I could not forbear, even thus publicly, pressing my lips to her bright cheek, which crimsoned with delight; while Sir James, who appeared determined to discover a compliment to himself in every one of my actions, paid me back my courtesy by raising my fingers to his lips. I could not forbear from time to time, during the dinner, which to me seemed painfully protracted, glancing at Mr. Curties, in order to discover if he preserved his equanimity. I saw not the slightest change. He ate and drank in perfect composure; and occasionally condescended to address a remark to Miss Grenvel, who sat beside him, evidently in awe. There was not one symptom of uneasiness to console my ruffled vanity. It was altogether inexplicable.

The devotion of Dornton knew no bounds. He seemed to challenge the envy and congratulations of all around him. He thanked me in the most gallant manner for the magnificent toilette which I had made upon what he was pleased to call our wedding-day; affecting to forget that a woman finds such a duty at all times both easy and pleasant; and as both my mother and Lord Otterford were equally complimentary on the subject of my appearance, I was glad to be convinced that my dressing-glass had not deceived me.

For the first time I felt that I had attained the object of my earliest ambition; I divided the suffrages of the circle with Lady Madelaine; and I had, moreover, the triumph of knowing that I had even over her the advantages of greater youth and greater novelty. I was no longer flattered and pampered as a beautiful child; I had taken my position in society, and my successes must be henceforth based upon my womanly qualities. I thought not once of Deveraux throughout the evening. The incense that was so profusely offered at my shrine oppressed my brain, and centred all my feelings in self. The past and the future were alike shrouded in vapour, and I lived only in the present.

The whole of the evening, until the departure of such of our guests as resided in the neighbourhood,

was occupied in music, and in the examination of the numerous and costly marriage presents which were awaiting me in the saloon. In vain did I volunteer my services at the harp, and my voice in a trio ; neither Sir James nor Lady Madelaine would permit me to use so much exertion in my invalid state. I had suddenly awakened in a new world—in a sort of gilded Utopia ! So I remained throned upon my sofa, playing with the jewels and toys scattered around me, content to look and listen to the performances of those whose health was, for the moment, tacitly understood to be less valuable than my own.

We remained the whole summer at Woodville ; but I had not been a bride more than a few months, when I expressed to Lady Madelaine the desire which I felt to pay a visit to my sister.

“ What will Sir James think of so strange a whim ? ” she asked drily.

“ Do you then consider it extraordinary,” I demanded in my turn, “ that I should wish to see Adela after the change which has taken place in my situation ? You are aware, madam, that I endeavoured to induce her to become my guest, which, for some reason of which I am ignorant, she declined. I confess that I felt deeply hurt, but still I cannot forget that she is my sister ; and that,

in her present exile, she may well expect so simple a courtesy from me."

"Your delicacy is somewhat wire-drawn, Eveleen;" retorted Lady Madelaine; "however, you are yet a bride, and must consequently, I suppose, be indulged in your caprices. Fortunately, the long and fatiguing journey to Rooksley will be spared, for Adela has been for the last few weeks the inhabitant of my villa at Putney."

"And why was so simple a circumstance kept secret from me?"

"Because it grew out of a speculation of a graver nature. Because Adela had just conceived one of those extraordinary whims which cannot be explained by any rational argument; but to which, young as she is, she adheres with a tenacity that my will has entirely failed to weaken; and as, I confess to you, the fatigue of so wretched a contention is greater than I am willing to encounter, I have at last consented to yield—under certain restrictions."

How well I recognized the iron nature of my sister in this immutability of purpose. "And what, then, is this strange fancy?" I asked eagerly.

Lady Madelaine shrugged her shoulders. "In the first place, I believe you are not yet aware that the relative who inherited the title and estates

of my poor father has formed the somewhat Quixotic project of disencumbering the property of certain rather extensive mortgages ; and, in aid of this endeavour, finding that his obligations both as a peer and a landlord were greater than he wished to encounter, he purposes to live abroad with all his family for the next few years, and to let the Castle during that time, retaining the land under the superintendence of a bailiff. Now, Miss Adela Tilden,—having, as it has since appeared, through the medium of Lady Flora, been in correspondence with the Earl, and ascertained, that to one of his own connections, who will, of course, appear only as his guest, he will cede Glenfillan Castle at a very small rent—has, child as she is, been continually, from the period of your betrothal, when she found that all chance of your returning to reside at Rooksley was at an end, importuning me to hire the place, and to allow her to make it her home, under the guardianship of Lady Flora.”

“ Her home !” I exclaimed aghast ; “ can she seriously ask you to allow her to bury herself alive at her age in so remote a spot ? Does she forget that there will be a long future ; and that her proper home, while she remains unmarried, is under the roof of her mother ?”

“ I have both said and written all that and much more ;” coldly replied Lady Madelaine ; “ but I

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“ you are just touching upon the circumstance which I was about to explain. How will you laugh, Eveleen ; you, young, rich, courted, and beloved, when I tell you that the mere girl who calls you sister, and who shares, or might share, all your advantages, save indeed as regards beauty, firmly believes that she has taken the world in abhorrence—or rather, to follow her own text more closely—that she holds it in contempt : and when I even went so far as to hint that I might possibly, in a few months, when I had seen you fairly settled at the head of your own establishment, call her to town, and give her every advantage of which she is susceptible, she peremptorily declared that she would never be taken to London alive, to be introduced to the frivolous and heartless society of what was called the fashionable world ; that it was not made for her, nor she for it ; and that consequently she put it to myself whether she should not be less obnoxious to me, and less burthensome to herself at Glenfillan than at Rooksley.”

“ She must be mad !” I murmured unconsciously.

“ Perhaps so. At all events, she is incomprehensible. Nothing will bend her will. Sick of the struggle, as I have already told you, I have at last yielded ; and she is at present at Putney with Lady Flora, making purchases of spelling-books and grammars for a school which she is to found,

and committing sundry other follies of the same description. As I have declined all further interference with so impracticable a young lady, I have offered neither comment nor hindrance to her last request, that she may be allowed to proceed to Scotland early in the ensuing month."

"I must lose no time, then, in reaching Putney;" I said, involuntarily rising from my chair, as though preparing to depart on the instant.

"Resume your seat;" said Lady Madelaine, calmly motioning me again to her side; "are you quite sure that Adela partakes your eagerness for this meeting? Do you feel satisfied that you will be a welcome visitor?"

"Why should I doubt it? I have never injured my sister."

Lady Madelaine bit her lip, and for a moment appeared disconcerted; but she soon conquered the feeling, from whatever impulse it arose; and continued with an arch smile: "You know the Italian proverb:

' Chi cerca quel che non dovrebbe
Trova quel che non vorrebbe:'

however, I will make no attempt to dissuade you from your purpose; one thing, nevertheless, you must remember, Eveleen—"

"What can prevent my performance of what I now consider actually as a duty?" I exclaimed;

“ who can say, even young as we both are, that we may ever meet again ?”

“ I repeat, Lady Dornton, that in so far as I am concerned, I advance no objection to your wish ; but you are quite forgetting that you have a husband, and that he may not approve of your repeating your advances to a younger sister, by whom they have already been repulsed.”

“ Sir James object !” I retorted ; with all the scorn of a spoiled beauty ; “ oh, no ; that is, indeed, improbable : I am by no means prepared for any such opposition.”

“ Possibly ; and yet such things are.”

“ Not in a case like mine. I assuredly did not become the wife of Sir James Dornton to be consigned once more to the nursery. I shall request him to be ready to accompany me to town the day after to-morrow.”

“ To town !” echoed the voice of my husband, who at the instant entered the room ; “ do I hear the fair and fashionable Lady Dornton threatening to go up to town, when no one is to be seen there but drapers and dustmen ?”

“ Why, not precisely, not completely, not avowedly ;” I answered in the same gay tone ; “ my fair and fashionable ladyship contemplates only the negative enormity of Putney, to visit her somewhat moonstruck sister ; and to endeavour, by a less

adventurous journey than that of Orlando, to win back her wits again."

I expected at least a smile in reward of my banter, but, to my extreme surprise, as I raised my eyes to meet it, I saw Sir James exchange an alarmed and rapid glance with my mother, while for a moment the blood forsook his cheek and lips; Lady Madelaine, however, was as calm as ever. She had not been taken by surprise.

"Is it not a wild whim?" she asked, with a smile.

"But Eveleen will not persist;" and he began playfully to smooth down my ringlets.

"Do not mistake me, Sir James;" I said, perfectly restored to seriousness; "I feel that I ought to see my sister before she leaves England. She is not happy—"

"Not happy?"

"Assuredly not, or she never would have formed so extreme a resolution. She does not understand what she so lightly rejects. I am resolved to use the influence I possess—"

"The influence you possess?"

"Even so; not only in dissuading her from a project so extravagant, but also by inducing her to confide to me—"

"Confide to you!"

"Really, Sir James," I exclaimed rather pet-

tishly, "one would imagine that we were rehearsing a scene from Othello ; you echo all my words."

"And no wonder," said my mother, coming skilfully to the rescue ; "Dornton, knowing what he does of Adela, may well be astonished on hearing you talk of possessing an influence over her, and of inducing her to make you her confidante."

"I am, indeed, thoroughly amazed ;" acquiesced Sir James ; "for I believed her to be utterly invulnerable to either advice or sympathy."

I was not satisfied with this well-acted explanation. It was evident that there was some mystery connected with the removal of my sister, which was to remain a secret from me. I even suspected that it was not voluntary, but had grown out of the scarcely-disguised and invincible dislike which I had long known Lady Madelaine to entertain towards her. All that had passed, therefore, only the more firmly determined me not to yield. I could derive no advantage from this concession to my sister's pride ; and of this she must be aware. I was, consequently, not without hope that this consideration on my part might indeed induce her to unbend, and to explain to me her real motives for so strange a resolution as that which I had just heard attributed to her own free will. Judging from my own experience, I knew that there were moments in which the heart was relieved by im-

parting its grief; might this not be her case now, when she was on the eve of separation from her family? The mystification which I had detected irritated and disheartened me; I felt as though it involved a return of the mental vassalage that I loathed; and I pledged myself to my own heart to be on this occasion as firm as Adela herself.

“ You will accompany me, Sir James?” I said suddenly, in a tone completely devoid of doubt.

“ I regret that it will be utterly impossible for me to do so;” answered my husband, in an accent as decided as my own; “ and in that fact, my sweet Eveleen, lies the whole secret of my annoyance at your project.”

“ I thought that you were an idle man, with no more serious business on hand than that of obliging your wife.”

“ Would that it were so; but that vile Irish affair ‘ drags its slow length along,’ and will admit of no neglect on my part just at present.”

“ Fortunately;” I said, considerably provoked; “ I am no coward. With my own maid, and a couple of men-servants, I shall be perfectly and correctly attended.”

“ Eveleen;” exclaimed Sir James; “ not for ten thousand worlds would I consent to such a scheme.”

“ You shall not be asked to do so;” said my mother; “ I will accompany Lady Dornton.”

He thanked her somewhat gravely, for he evidently desired that the journey should be abandoned altogether. He complained of my coldness in leaving him to visit a sister who had never shown me the slightest affection ; talked of the ungenial season, and my recent illness ; in short, tried all means of altering my resolution, but without effect. Had not my suspicions been aroused, he would probably have succeeded ; but, as it was, his multiplied objections only strengthened my purpose. My pride revolted when it whispered that, in some way or other, I had been made a dupe.

CHAPTER XXI.

I did not thoroughly recover my temper until I found myself in the carriage which was to convey my mother and myself to Putney. During the brief interval which had elapsed between making the arrangement and seeing it realized, Sir James had exhausted himself in affectionate attentions, which I received coldly and with suspicion ; for I at once discovered that he still entertained the hope of changing my resolution. I felt like a mariner about to explore an unknown shoal ; and I looked to my sister to supply the sounding-line.

Once in the carriage, even before we had left the grounds, and while the touch of Dornton's lips was still warm upon my cheek, I recovered my equanimity, and commenced a conversation with Lady Madelaine, by sincerely thanking her for the consideration which had induced her to become my companion ; a concession to which I was the more sensible, as my husband had failed to emulate it.

“ You were unreasonable to expect so much, Eveleen ;” she said in reply. “ Men detest the lachrymosities of *soi-disant* broken-hearted young ladies ; and Sir James, charming as he is, is nevertheless only mortal.”

“ But if Adela be, as you imply, broken-hearted, you must surely also be aware of the cause of her sorrow.”

“ A purely false deduction. I only know that she has succeeded in making her very name odious to me ; and that I shall rejoice when I know that she is safely housed at Glenfillan.”

“ How long ago was it, did you say, since she first made the request ?”

“ Several months ; I really forget the precise period ; it was about the commencement of your illness.”

“ At the time of my betrothal ?”

“ Somewhat later ; and it was to endeavour to make her hear reason that I urged on your marriage, and left you so abruptly at Woodville. Instead of proceeding at once to town, Lord Otterford and myself travelled to Rooksley ill affected as I was towards such a journey ; and as I found that nothing but coercion would enable me to overcome her wishes, and that I did not possess the slightest authority over her, unless I condescended to have recourse to force, we decided that

she must be treated like an embryo-lunatic as she is, and indulged in her whim until she herself wearies of it. Having come to this determination, Lord Otterford consented to remain a week at Rooksley, while Lady Flora and her amiable charge made their parting arrangements, in order that they might have his protection upon the road ; and, as their domestication in Grosvenor Square during the season was of course not to be thought of, we decided upon settling them at Putney until their departure for Scotland."

" You think, then, that it is a mere temporary caprice ?"

" I judge like a rational being, and cannot imagine otherwise."

" It is, at least, very singular," I remarked, " that such an extraordinary circumstance should never have been mentioned to me. Has no one save yourself and Lord Otterford been made acquainted with it ?"

" You must have seen that it was known to Sir James."

" Ah, true ! It was evidently no secret to him ; and may I ask if he favoured your compliance with the wishes of my sister ?"

" He very properly declined to offer any opinion whatever upon the subject."

" And Lord Otterford ?"

“ Very naturally felt with, and for me ; as did all the friends whom I considered it expedient to consult. It would, as a matter of course, have been named to you, had I not been anxious, during your illness, to save you from annoyance of every description ; and subsequently also, but that I thought it likely to throw a gloom over your meeting with your husband.”

“ How was it calculated to do this, and why should it produce such an effect ? ” I asked earnestly.

“ On my honour, Lady Dornton, *vous excédez !* ” exclaimed my mother pettishly ; “ you catechize like the teacher of a Sunday-school, and seem to forget that my nerves are not made of iron. Pray let me sleep off the irritating effects of our abrupt and uninteresting dialogue. Believe me, your sister will soon convince you that she is not worthy of such a waste of words.”

Of course I was silenced, for I still stood in too much awe of Lady Madelaine to brave her displeasure ; and although I felt convinced that she only sought to avoid an explanation, I was, consequently compelled to content myself throughout the remainder of the journey with the companionship of my own thoughts ; for while we were upon the road, she perseveringly slept, or affected to sleep ; and when we alighted, she flung herself into an

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to my sister ; and I was still engaged in so doing, when Lady Madelaine entered the room.

“ For whom are you preparing those presents ?” she asked, as her eye fell upon the ornaments.

“ For my sister.”

“ It is useless ;” she said gravely ; “ Miss Tilden is too high-minded to find pleasure in such toys : do not draw down an affront upon yourself.”

“ Surely I need apprehend no insult where I mean only kindness ?”

“ Do as you will—take them in your hand ; you will be the most proper judge of the expediency of suggesting their acceptance.”

I was already half convinced that it would be useless. I knew how easily my sister's pride was roused ; and, with a sigh of regret, I silently consigned them once more to my dressing-case, and followed Lady Madelaine down stairs.

Not a word passed between us, until we reached Putney. I was all dread, curiosity, and agitation, and in no mood for conversation ; while my mother had doubtlessly her own memories to occupy her thoughts.

Despite all the coldness with which she had treated me since we parted, my sister, when she entered the room on our arrival, was so pale, so wasted, and so changed, that I could not control my emotion, and the tears streamed from my eyes.

“Are you weeping over me, Lady Dornton?” she asked calmly. “You are fortunate if you can afford to weep for others.”

“Oh, Adela, why have you urged Lady Madelaine to allow your banishment?” I exclaimed, as I seized her hand; “I have but just learned the unwelcome news of this intended departure; and even now can scarcely credit that it is in compliance with your own wish.”

“Why should you not believe it?” and as she spoke, she seated herself quietly beside me; “you are not ignorant that the human heart is subject to extraordinary changes.”

I felt the point of the remark, and my cheek flushed. Lady Madelaine, who saw that I was hurt, addressed some common-place observation to my sister, who made a brief reply, and a pause to me more painful than even the most bitter sarcasm ensued. I could not speak. Adela sat in silence, as if awaiting the purport of a visit which she had evidently not desired; and my mother threw herself back upon her sofa, and closed her eyes. The spell was at length, however, broken by Lady Madelaine herself, who, wearied by the constraint to which she had for a moment submitted, suddenly rose, declaring that she had some directions to give to Lady Flora.

This was, as I thought, the crisis of my fate.

I was dying to interrogate Adela, and trembling at the idea of being questioned in my turn.

We were no sooner alone than my sister turned upon me a long and searching look which seemed to penetrate my very heart.

“Are you happy?” she asked abruptly.

“I have submitted to circumstances, and my reason tells me to deduce what profit I may from my submission.”

“Answer me more frankly—are you happy?”

“Yes—almost—at least I am not otherwise.”

“Sir James loves you then?”

“Devotedly; of that, at least, I am convinced.”

“And you?”

“Me!—I—”

“Why do you hesitate? Does not the husband whom you have chosen appear to justify your affection?”

I was perfectly unprepared for such an attack as this, and knew not with what arms to repel it. The difficulty roused my temper, and anger lent me courage. Not only did I acknowledge the love which I believed that I felt for Dornon, but I exaggerated his good qualities, and the devotion and self-abnegation which he had displayed in the indulgence of all my tastes and wishes. I was almost eloquent.

“Spare me the details of his perfections;” said

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“Ha! you imagined that such was my case.”

“I did.”

“You reasoned upon your own experience; nothing could be more natural. Nevertheless, you were wrong, as you will ever be when you try my actions by the same test. Lady Madelaine has employed no authority to induce what you have, somewhat romantically, termed my ‘exile;’ on the contrary, I decided on the step which I am about to take at a moment when your life was considered to be in imminent danger, and when, consequently, my determined estrangement from my mother would have rendered her, morally, if not actually childless; and her remonstrances were comparatively vehement.”

“I am lost in wonder!” I said dejectedly; “how unjust have I been in accusing Lady Madelaine of the sacrifice to which you have wilfully consigned yourself.”

“There are sacrifices of all kinds;” was the reply; “that which I have made is assuredly not the contemplated sojourn in Scotland.”

“Can I, in any way, or by any exertion, induce you to abandon your design?”

“No.”

“I seem to be surrounded by mystery. Oh, Adela, I beseech you—”

“To do what? To explain to you my motives!

Never. My secret is my own, and shall remain so, until—In short, in my turn, I entreat you to respect it—Learn it when you will, you must repent the knowledge.”

“ Be it what it may,” I retorted vehemently. “ I condemn it. You have over-rated your strength. The existence which, as a girl, was tolerable and even pleasant, will, at your present age, wither you by its hopeless monotony.”

“ I should have judged so once ; but I then mistook my true means of happiness.”

“ Happiness ! Do you hope to find it at Glenfillan ?”

“ I shall find what I seek ; the only benefit which can henceforward avail me.”

The words of my sister were so obscure, that they only increased my curiosity. I redoubled my efforts to induce her to confide in me, but she was impenetrable, and at length lost her temper.

“ You are indelicate, Eveleen ;” she said haughtily ; “ why do you harass me with entreaties, when I have declared that they will be unavailing ?”

“ I will do so no longer, since you do not consider me worthy of your confidence ; but let me at least entreat you not to take so serious a step without seriously considering what may, and indeed must, be its effect upon the whole of your future life.

You know nothing of the world, or of its pleasures ; you are ignorant of the happiness of loving and being beloved, save in theory—and remember what bright visions you used to evoke—”

“ Enough !” she said sternly ; “ I want no advice ; and even were it otherwise, you are the last person to whom I should apply for counsel.”

As all my expressions had been affectionate as well as earnest, I felt offended by the tone which my sister had assumed ; and had not Lady Madelaine at that precise moment returned, accompanied by the happy Lady Flora, who walked into the room as though she were already treading upon heather, I fear this so much desired interview with my sister would have terminated in anger on both sides. Our mutual agitation did not escape my mother, and she appeared uneasy and irresolute, when I rose, and proposed that we should return to town. She offered no opposition, however ; and with a cold embrace, and hearts more estranged than ever, Adela and I parted.

We had no sooner left the villa than Lady Madelaine, with an anxiety which she vainly strove to conceal, hastened to inquire what could be the nature of the conversation which I had held with my sister, and by which we had both evidently been so much moved ; I told her frankly.

“ Why do you persist in so thankless an inter-

ference?" she asked impatiently; "pray permit Miss Tilden to make herself ridiculous in her own way, since she has determined to do so. Setting aside the consideration that your fortune may, hereafter, be greatly benefitted by her obstinacy, there are a thousand other reasons which must make her wrong-headedness advantageous to you. Do you not yet understand that your sister's disposition, tastes, and prejudices are all calculated to annoy and injure you, were you to mix in the same society? I will even warn you, moreover, that private conversations, such as this for which you were lately so eager, and which has only tended to wound and exasperate your feelings, can conduce to no favourable result; and are only calculated to produce very disagreeable effects. You will be wise to avoid them for the future, whenever you are flung together, and to make the most of the brilliant position you have secured, without troubling yourself with the sickly fancies of an ungracious girl."

I was quite in the mood to believe that she was right; and I accordingly pledged myself to follow her advice, and to leave Adela to her discontent. The alternative was, at least, an easy one; and the rapture of Sir James on my return to Woodville assisted me wonderfully in the effort.

It was really, therefore, from curiosity at the moment, and not from any lingering remnant of affection, that I one day inquired what had become of Devereux ; and, as a proof of the perfect composure with which I was able to put the question, I addressed it to my husband, who, with a tact and taste which did him honour, answered as calmly as myself. He had just obtained promotion in his regiment, and was extremely zealous in his military duties, to the great edification of Sir Herbert, and the amusement of his mother. I received the intelligence coldly enough, for I still felt sufficient interest in him to be piqued by his marked and studious neglect ; and to experience a little bitterness at the thought that his love for me had been superseded by the poor vanity of rising in his profession. Nevertheless I rejoiced to perceive that it did not affect my feelings ; and my heart bounded, as it whispered that I had conquered a weakness, for which his fickleness now made me blush.

His fickleness ! How amusing are the one-sided judgments of those who will only see one phase of a question ! I accused Devereux of fickleness—I, who had become the wife of another man, and moreover of the very man whom I had long professed alike to dislike and to despise. I knew that Lady Madelaine had closed her doors against

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should produce in town, or an expression of curiosity as to how the rivalry of my beauty—and such beauty—would be borne by the *blanches* belles of the last two seasons. At length, on one occasion, I ventured to say timidly—

“Why should we not essay the experiment?”

“Are you serious, Eveleen?”

“*Pourquoi pas?* I imagine that we cannot remain at Woodville for ever.”

“I am glad that you have made the observation, dearest;” replied Dornton eagerly; “I will confess to you that it is irksome to me. In short, it is not *home*. We have not yet tasted the delights of home, Eveleen.”

“You are right. We will only remain in Grosvenor Square while we decide upon a house; and then, Sir James, we will assert our independence, and emancipate ourselves.”

“Admirably decided! And when shall we put our project into execution?”

“Now—this moment, if you wish it.”

“Nay, nay, not so fast;” laughed Dornton; “we must first acquaint Lady Madelaine with our intention, and name to her the precise day on which she may expect us.”

“So be it. Let me see—this is Saturday. Tell her that we will be with her on Thursday.”

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congratulated myself upon the prudence and forethought of my husband, for I was fairly exhausted by my exertions; and while Sir James was still deprecating the insufficiency of the arrangements which had been made for my accommodation, I fell asleep, only to renew in my dreams the bright fancies that had sustained me throughout the day.

END OF VOL. II.



11

THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

BY
MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF
"THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," ETC.

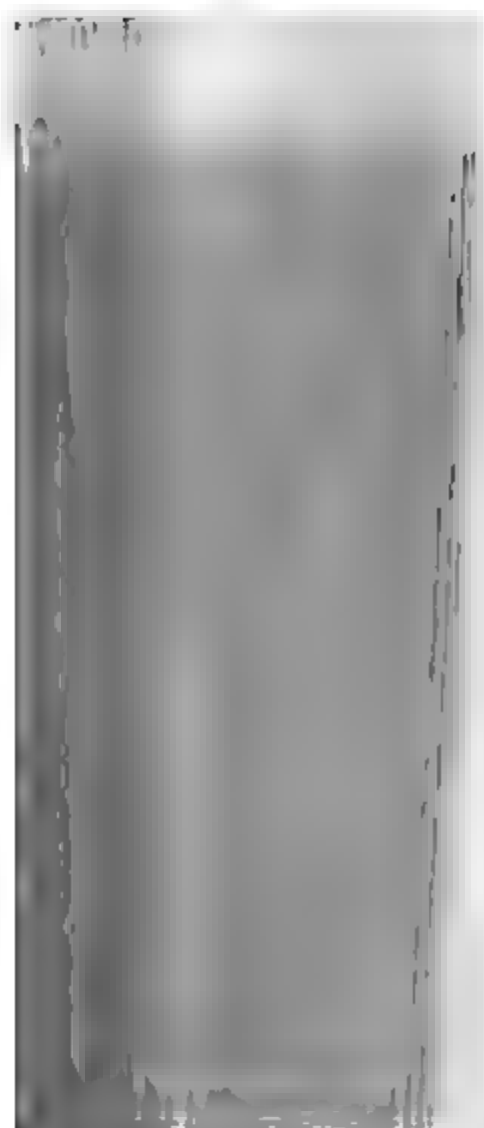
At sixteen, she came out ; presented, vaunted,
She put all couruets into commotion ;
At seventeen, too, the world was still enchanted
With the new Venus of their brilliant ocean ;
At eighteen, though below her feet still panted
A hecatomb of suitors with devotion,
She had consented to create again
That Adam called "the happiest of men."
Byron.

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THE CONFESSIONS
OF
A PRETTY WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

The period of marriage is the one great epoch of a woman's life. It is a condensation of courteous deceit and flattering promise, which require months, and sometimes even years, to annihilate their effects. Custom has ordained that every man should commence his wedded career by a tissue of self-abnegation and devotedness, of which the sex is utterly incapable for any length of time; while the world, never slow to claim its share in any glozing cheat, helps on the illusion of the bride by a species of general and gracious worship, which, just as it wanes to a close, has become necessary to the happiness of its idol, who seldom fails to discover, amid the intoxication of the incense, that its fumes are directed elsewhere. Custom has timed the duration of the sacrifice;

and when, at the close of the given period, the bride has degenerated into the wife, the *prestige* ceases; the married dame is no longer more than a mere unit in the great sum-total of the world; and she is quietly handed down from her pedestal to make way for a new victim.

These are trite truths; but they, nevertheless, deserve more and deeper reflection than are commonly accorded to them. How many women, during their period of courtship, stop short in all their anticipations of the future, at the indulgences, and triumphs, and congratulations of the honeymoon? How many wilfully close their eyes to the long years which are to succeed it? It is the fashion to smile, and nod, and felicitate the poor, inexperienced, self-deluded girl, who is about to commit matrimony, however ill-advised her selection may appear to her acquaintance. Beyond the pale of her own family, it is rare indeed that she possesses one friend gifted with sufficient moral courage to bid her pause. She might find a warning against any other imprudence; but who would counsel an acquaintance not to marry? A marriage is a feast for the idle gossipry of the circle in which it takes place; and what trifle would destroy its own aliment, for so puerile a reason as that of urging prudence upon the party from whom it is to be derived? We

have no right to expect so Utopian a sacrifice from the butterflies, who, as they cannot live without sunshine, so they care little whence it comes; and the effect of all this folly and false feeling is fatal to its object, who has neither opportunity nor inclination to recollect that the smiling flatterers, who seek only their own amusement in an event which must affect the after-happiness of her whole life, would, although they gladly participate in the festivities of the marriage feast, not waste one hour of their own existence in sharing her sorrows or her tears.

I have often thought that marriage resembled a sky-rocket. How brilliantly and aspiringly it commences, grasping another element in its ascent, as though this flat, dull earth could not content its aspirations, nor afford space for its display; then how dazzlingly it blazes for a moment; and, that moment past, how, one by one, its star-like fires go out; until at length, down-tumbling, dark, and dangerous, falls back all that is left of the false meteor, a few floating ashes and a smoking stick.

Perhaps it is well that young people should not look so gravely upon realities as their elders; for they naturally hunger and thirst for the pleasant things of the world, and might turn away with

disgust at its very threshold, were they at once to lift the covers of the tempting banquet spread out before them, and discover that, as at the table of the Barmecide, they were bidden to a feast of empty dishes. I am only quarrelling with those who unnecessarily deepen their delusion, and thus render their after-experience more bitter.

In my case I had certainly been spared all idle and anticipatory comments. I had completed a sacrifice, not volunteered a folly; but I was not doomed to escape the after-delusion to which I have alluded. Every bride, situated as I was in the world, must necessarily commence her married career brilliantly; and, moreover, the novelty of my position, the comparative freedom of action, the feeling, or the belief, that I was beloved, the natural clingingness of my disposition, the chimaera of independence, and the consciousness of increased importance, all naturally tended to impress me favourably towards the individual to whom I was indebted for these advantages. Dornton, moreover, was beside me, anticipating every thought and wish, and blending his own image with every picture of my newly-awakened fancy.

I have said how patiently he encouraged my wild, and, no doubt, unreasonable anticipations;

and I was grateful to him for his show of sympathy in my feelings: to me such sympathy was as new as it was welcome. Herein, at least, he had an advantage over Devereux, who had possessed no opportunity of displaying a similar deference to my tastes and wishes; and this fact, coupled with the consciousness that all further struggle was useless, now that I was irrevocably his wife, helped the cause of Sir James better than a score of arguments. I had been cowed and crossed so long, that I panted to be free and to be happy; and, as I had not yet heard the clanking of the fetters which I had so lately assisted to rivet, so I willingly nursed myself in the belief that the burthen would be light, and might even prove ultimately rather a pleasure than a trammel. In short, who cannot guess the hopes and the feelings of a weak and vain young heart, panting for admiration and for liberty?

It was dusk in the evening of the second day after our departure from Woodville, when we reached town; the lamps were already lighted, and the tall dark avenues of houses appeared gigantic in the closing light. I leaned eagerly from the window of the carriage, and inhaled the murky atmosphere with delight. This was to be the arena of my conquests, the theatre of my triumphs.

My heart bounded with delight. Suddenly the carriage stopped, and Sir James sprang out, and lifted me with great care into the house, whose open door seemed to invite our entrance; but in the hall I paused, for I did not recognize the objects before me. Strange servants, in a livery which was not familiar to me, were busied in receiving us; and the staircase towards which Dornton led me, was equally unknown.

“Where are we?” I asked anxiously; “and why do we not go at once to my mother’s?”

“We are *at home*, sweet love; and Lady Madelaine is here, waiting to welcome you.”

Never was surprise more pleasant. I pressed the hand of my husband tenderly in my own; and although my lips were silent, he could read my thanks in the look which I turned upon him. One cause, at least, of his long absence from Woodville was explained, and a portion of the time had been spent in my service.

When the doors of the drawing-room were flung back to give us entrance, a flood of light inundated the staircase; while, instantly that we were announced, Lady Madelaine appeared upon the threshold, superbly dressed, and radiant with smiles; and in her suite appeared all such of her friends as she was anxious should extend their

countenance to myself. The whole party were in full dress, and as I glanced rapidly around me, a blush of annoyance rose to my cheek when I remembered my own travelling costume. I was not long suffered, however, to experience this mortification, for before Sir James had made the tour of the room, and replied to the greeting of the guests, my mother approached me, and with a meaning smile, offered to do the honours of my house, while I went to my room to remove my bonnet and shawl. I obeyed without comment, happy to escape from a scene in which I must have appeared like a dark spot in a sea of light; when, guided by a comely-looking housekeeper, and attended by Joséphine, I soon found myself in a charming dressing-room, which seemed to have been furnished by the hands of fairies, it was so fresh, so gay, and so luxurious in its arrangements. Nor did I find less pleasure in contemplating half a dozen exquisite dresses, temptingly spread forth to await my selection; and a case of magnificent diamonds, which the housekeeper reverently informed me were the family jewels of the Dorntons, re-set under the superintendence of Lady Madelaine, and which her Ladyship particularly requested me to wear on that evening.

I was enchanted! I think that Cinderella

must have had very similar feelings after the arrival of her beneficent godmother, on the occasion of the ball given by the Prince.

I could have amused myself very pleasantly for an hour in examining my new possessions, but Joséphine reminded me of the expectant guests, and I forthwith commenced my somewhat elaborate toilette. In a short time my glass reflected a face and figure which I contemplated with considerable complacency. Never had I been so magnificently attired. Blazing with jewels, clad in white silk brocade, richly flowered, and wearing rouge for the first time, I was enraptured at the effect which I was about to produce, and this feeling alone gave me courage to tear myself away from the friendly mirror. All memory, all regret, were absorbed by vanity; at that moment, the present sufficed to satisfy my heart.

When I entered the drawing-room, I was greeted by that low and flattering murmur which outweighs a score of compliments, and never fails to convince a woman of the exact extent of her personal advantages. Sir James advanced to meet me with eyes beaming with proud delight; and I was too well pleased with myself not to be equally so with him. It was through his agency that I had achieved this triumph; and, as a natural consequence, he became to me an object of

increasing interest and consideration. The dinner was *recherché* in the extreme; and as, for the first time, I presided at my own table, I felt that I was at length independent of the shackles under which I had so long writhed. All the conversation around me turned on the various engagements of the different individuals—on the necessity of my immediate presentation at Court on my marriage—on the situation of my Opera-box and the importance of securing a ticket for the ball of the beautiful Duchess of D——, which was to take place in a fortnight. I was surrounded by assurances of the admiration and envy which I was certain to excite in the Court circle—to all of which Sir James listened with evident gratification.

Our party separated at an early hour, for several of the guests had sacrificed other engagements in order to assist Lady Madelaine in welcoming me to my new home; and all were expected elsewhere in the course of the night. Gratified as I had been, I was, nevertheless not sorry to see them depart; for I was fatigued from excitement and exertion; and although my mother lingered to the last, in order to receive my acknowledgments for the very effective assistance which she had rendered to Dornton, and the expression of my satisfaction at the arrangements which had

been made for my reception, both of which I tendered freely and earnestly, she also departed in her turn, and I again found myself *tête-à-tête* with my husband.

My heart was overflowing with happiness, and I poured forth my thanks to Sir James with an energy for which he was evidently not prepared, and which appeared to produce a great effect upon him.

"You do not then regret, Eveleen ;" he said ; "that you have been induced to entrust your happiness to my keeping?"

"I were indeed ungrateful to do so !" I replied. "And so you were really thinking of me, and of my gratification during your absence from Woodville?"

"Was it not a duty, as well as a delight?"

"Oh, not a word of duty ;" I exclaimed laughing. "It is too chilling a consideration for such a moment as this—a blight upon the flowers—a shadow over the sun."

"And yet your duties will be light, my sweet wife ; all I ask is to see you happy, fashionable, and idolized ; and all this is in your own power."

Nothing could be more charming. And at the close of this little dialogue, we proceeded in matrimonial arm in arm, to explore our new habitation. Even accustomed as I had been,

from my childhood, to taste and luxury, I was compelled to admit that I had seen nothing to compare with the residence of which I had become the mistress. The golden wand of wealth had been guided by the hand of elegance; and there was repose as well as splendour in all around me.

Those were the palmy days of boudoirs, and mine was perfect. Lady Madelaine had excelled herself. Her egotism had placed me in a perilous position; and it was necessary to dazzle and amuse me, in order to blind me to the fact. She could not have succeeded better. Admirable tactician as she was, she was well aware that I could be led through my vanity alone, to forget, or at least to forgive, the past; and she acted upon that conviction. All assumption of authority was laid aside; she counselled and assisted, but never controlled me. I was plunged suddenly into a vortex of dissipation. My presentation took place under the most flattering circumstances; the Queen condescended to congratulate me on my marriage, and the Princesses on my recovery. At the ball of the Duchess of D——, I walked a minuet with the Prince of Wales; and on the following day the journals teemed with descriptions of my dress, my grace, and my fashion. All London left their names at my door;

and no entertainment was considered perfect at which I was not present. My box at the Opera was the resort of all that was great and gifted in the capital; even royalty itself was my frequent guest. Poets were eloquent in my praise; and politicians forbore to argue when I smiled. I had not a moment unoccupied; not a moment for a calm and rational survey of those serious duties, and that awful responsibility, which I had taken upon me. I was a mere feather on the summer-breath of the world, wafted hither and thither by the current of every idle fancy, and every puerile ambition. More than once I had listened, not only to the accents of flattery, but even to the withering words of passion; but they had passed by me unheeded, and without quickening a single pulse. Herein, at least, I played an equal game with the world, for I was simply living in myself, and for myself, and had no sentiment to bestow on others.

Dornton, meanwhile, was the very model of a high-bred husband. Ever ready to second me in any scheme of pleasure or expense; ever willing to share in my amusements, and equally satisfied to seek his own when I did not require his attendance, he was never either negligent or intrusive; while his undoubted fashion and unequivocal popularity, flattered my vanity, and satisfied my self-love.

So passed the season ; and, on the invitation of Lady Madelaine, we proceeded to spend a couple of months at Rooksley, which, since the departure of my sister and her guardian, had resumed all its wonted elegance. I have since thought that my mother urged this arrangement in order to convince herself that I had thoroughly conquered my passion for Devereux. Be that as it may, however, it is certain that it was not without emotion I once more found myself amid scenes so familiar to me, and so redolent alike of happy and painful recollections. Nevertheless, I can truly assert that my first memory was of my sister. How utterly had the giddy round of pleasure obliterated her image from my mind ! I had, indeed, been informed casually by Lady Madelaine, that she had arrived safely at Glenfillan, and expressed her perfect satisfaction at the realization of her project : but this was all that I knew, or had cared to know ; and it was only on my arrival at Rooksley, when I was endeavouring, by the repose of an hour to overcome the fatigue of my journey from town, that I remembered, and dwelt upon her faded look, and the hollow cough which, despite her efforts to suppress it, had escaped her several times during our last brief interview. My reflections were, however, very slightly tinged with self-reproach.

Adela's estrangement had been her own work; she was self-exiled from her family; she had not addressed one letter to me since her arrival in Scotland; and if I had been equally silent, I felt that I had only to revert to my last attempt at correspondence with her, in order at once to find my justification.

Of Devereux, I scarcely thought at all; and in the dignity of my new character I even tried to smile at the folly of my girlish fancy. I was not prepared to comprehend that the lingering and most happy effects of that fancy, had been to render me insensible to the dangerous homage of less scrupulous admirers. Such a suspicion never crossed my mind. I never dreamed of looking beyond my own will for my strength.

A fatal error, fatally expiated!

CHAPTER II.

Doubtlessly Lady Madelaine was satisfied with the success of the test to which she had subjected me, when, at the close of a fortnight, she found me as exacting, as self-centered, and as indifferent as usual; for, on descending to dinner at the termination of that period, she congratulated Lord Otterford, in my presence, on the promotion of his nephew, who had just obtained a company in his regiment; and as she did so, I felt that her eyes were fixed steadily upon my face. Sooth to say, this information interested me but little: I believed that the world had done its work upon me, and that I was no longer the fond and feeble girl I had once been; while so long a time had elapsed since we parted, that I was careless on the subject of meeting him again. I imagined the wound in my heart to be healed; I knew not that it was yet too freshly scarred to be safely handled.

Resolved therefore to parade my indifference—

and was not this affectation enough of itself to teach me the necessity of caution?—I raised my head from the beads which I was stringing, and said, with a polite smile; “Suffer me, my Lord, to add my congratulations to those of my mother, on the subject of Colonel Devereux. Sir Herbert must be enchanted.” Lady Madelaine glanced triumphantly at her husband; but I suspect that he was less easily convinced than herself upon the subject of my present feelings. From the period of Emily Vernon’s melancholy death, he had occasionally given way to fits of depression, which I never failed to attribute to his memory of the past; and it is probable that experience of the power of a real passion had taught him more rightly to appreciate my self-delusion. He had sacrificed his better feelings to the wealth he wanted;—I had buried mine under the rose-leaves of vanity, and the glittering pall of dissipation and frivolity. Wretched alternatives both; the one as ineffective as the other, when divested of the *prestige* of novelty.

The first dinner-bell had rung, and I was still lingering in the drawing-room in order to finish the bracelet which had been the occupation of my morning, (and in which Lady Madelaine had, to my great surprise, evinced so extraordinary an interest that she remained beside me to witness

its completion) when the door suddenly opened, and Colonel Devereux was announced. The abruptness of his entrance threw me off my guard, and I uttered a faint scream, and suffered the coral beads to scatter themselves over the carpet. My mother, by whom he was evidently expected, skilfully covered the accident by receiving him with flattering felicitations, to which, however, he replied in a brief and agitated manner. Compelled, at length to approach me, he faltered out a few words of which I could not seize the sense, and which he did not, in all probability, himself comprehend; bowed low without raising his eyes, and then turned abruptly to shake hands with Lord Otterford, who had not risen from his chair; and who did not appear altogether satisfied of the expediency of my mother's present experiments.

Gradually however, he recovered his gaiety, and overwhelmed his nephew with questions, to which the latter replied 'yes' and 'no' with apparent unconsciousness of his own utterance, and occasionally in the wrong places; as for me, I affected to be diligently collecting the beads which had fallen, glad to escape on so innocent a pretext, the searching glances of Lady Madelaine. Nothing was wanting to render the whole scene insupportable, but the presence of Sir James; and five

minutes afterwards he entered the room with his gun in his hand, to apologise for his delay, and to give us an account of his prowess.

I saw at once that he was prepared for the presence of Devereux, for he did not even attempt to affect surprise, but met him with an extended hand, and a bland smile, as though he were the individual of all others who was most welcome at the moment. The feeling was, however, not reciprocal. Devereux, indeed, took the proffered hand, but his repugnance was almost visible, and his coldness beyond mistake.

Affecting not to perceive the chilliness of our new guest, Sir James persisted in lavishing upon him the most flattering attentions; after which he turned to me, expressed his overpowering uneasiness at my paleness, and implored me to be more careful of myself, lest I should bring on a relapse of my illness. All this unnecessary parade of anxiety was torture to me, for at that particular moment I would have given a year of life to have become invisible upon his entrance. I felt at once that my imagined indifference to Devereux had vanished like an icicle in the sunshine, when he was again actually in my presence.

He was surrounded by an atmosphere of fond and pleasant memories. I saw him the same, indeed, whom I had loved, but increased in manly

beauty, grace, and self-possession. The world had done its work lovingly upon him, and the period of our separation had been to him one of both moral and physical gain. I had reason to believe that such had also been the case with myself; and, even then, when I ought to have hoped that, like me, he had found an alternative for his early passion, and would now meet me with indifference, I felt my heart beating proudly with the conviction that, once more thrown into contact with me, it was at least improbable that he should do so.

I had never before seriously remembered that Sir James Dornton, handsome and high-bred as he undoubtedly was, had nevertheless numbered forty summers! It was an untoward moment to register the fact. Fortunately for all parties, Lord Otterford, to whom the ceremony of dinner had become by no means unimportant, reminded us that the second bell would ring in a few moments, and that we were still unprepared for the summons.

I had risen from my seat before the words left his lips, anxious to escape, and to find myself alone for an instant. I did not comprehend the revolution which the mere presence of Devereux had wrought in my feelings towards both myself and my husband; nor did I understand the mean-

ing of his own manner. That he was embarrassed was sufficiently evident; for not only had he not addressed to me one intelligible word—that I could readily have forgiven him—but I had not even detected one look turned towards me. What did this fact imply? Did he fear my power over him? Or, did he seek to shew me that my influence was at an end?

I tried to hope that the latter might be the case. I tried to hope so, but I did not: my vanity would tolerate no such wish—no such credence. My principle and my woman-pride were at war. The one was built up on expediency, and the other wrought and throbbed through every pulse of my being; I could not even deceive myself as to the result of my mental struggle. I did not: but as Joséphine arranged my hair, and expatiated upon the “*superbe beauté*” of Colonel Devereux; I vowed to myself to maintain, not only my dignity as a married woman, but also the supremacy of my attractions, by once more bringing my old suitor to my feet—of course in all honesty and honour. As a lover, I could consider him no more; but I could not brook that he should vow to another woman the allegiance which had been mine. I remembered Lord Otterford before his marriage, and during the life of my father. Neither Lady Madelaine nor Sir

James had seen cause for blame in the bond of admiring and devoted friendship which had united them. Neither Lady Madelaine nor Sir James, *et pour cause*, could demur to the existence of a similar tie between myself and Devereux.

The argument was specious—but, could any one have read my heart, and asked me what indeed it was which I proposed to myself in this compromise with my conscience, I am quite sure that I could have given no rational reply. In short, I did not venture to look into the future. I forgot how weakly and unworthily I had behaved to the man whom I was still plotting to enslave and to secure as the victim of my vanity; and I placed my mother's example before me, as the screen which was to be my protection from the animadversions of the world, and the reproaches of my own conscience.

I profited by the previous delay to remain in my dressing-room for several minutes after the second bell had rung; and nearly exhausted the patience of Joséphine by the caprice which I exhibited with regard to my toilette. We had lived so utterly *en famille* since our arrival at Rooksley, that I had become somewhat negligent upon this point; and the *soubrette* was not prepared for so sudden a demonstration as that with which I now favoured her. At length, however, all was

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you give me your arm to the dining-room?" and, as he obeyed, without once glancing towards me, she swept by in the proud dignity of her matronly beauty, crushing, as she did so, the light drapery of my muslin robe beneath the heavy folds of her black velvet dress.

At table, I found myself seated nearly opposite to Devereux; but, so far as concerned himself, he might as well have been established at the antipodes. He did not even appear conscious of my presence: or so, at least, I interpreted the resolute avoidance which he exhibited. Attentive and gallant to Lady Madelaine, he had neither eyes nor ears for me; and, in fact, the dinner was half over before anything beyond a casual remark had been addressed to me by any of the party. My heart was swelling with mortification and wounded vanity.

Was Devereux then always to see me only as the chidden child? Was I never to be permitted to assert myself in his presence? And, was he too, to adopt the tone of my mother—that mother whom he had once professed to dislike and to avoid,—in order to wound my self-respect?

I felt the tears rising to my eyes, and scalding the lids upon which they hung; and I trembled

lest they should fall; when, during a sudden pause, Lady Madelaine remarked ironically:

“Lady Dornton is fond of surprises, even in small matters, it would seem. By the time which she consumed at her toilette, I anticipated something brilliant in the way of costume; and, lo! she has made her appearance in her dressing gown.”

“You are a strange little girl, Eveleen;” followed up Sir James. “How are we to interpret your pastoral attire? Are we to attribute it to a modesty which disclaims admiration, or to a vanity which demands it, despite all drawbacks?”

“I will not venture to estimate the extent of your generosity;” I said, forcing a smile; “but I believe that I have seldom deviated from this same simplicity of which you accuse me to-day for the first time, since we have been a family party.” As I ceased speaking, I glanced at Devercux. His eyes were fixed upon me, nor did he withdraw them until I had met the long, sad look with which they were filled. Their expression was beyond mistake. He loved me still—he regretted my loss—he was unhappy: and unhappy through my means!

What a singular problem is a female heart!—

Although at that moment I felt as if I could have been happy in his happiness, I was nevertheless rejoiced to feel that he had suffered for my sake, that he was still in the toils—that we were not utterly separated.

From that instant I became gay even to folly ; I jested with Lord Otterford, and paid back every epigram which Lady Madelaine launched against me, with a point which, before the close of the evening, taught her greater caution. I became dazzling from the consciousness of my success, and exhausted all my powers of pleasing with a lavishness worthy of a crowd of listeners. As the brow of my mother darkened, my own became more radiant. She felt my triumph bitterly, and I knew it. Little did she guess the source of the wild spirits by which I was inspired, or her envy would have ceased at once.

My secret saved me while I could retain it. I was in the position of one mortally wounded by a dagger ; while the weapon still remains in the wound he can live, and pour forth his thoughts, and gaze around him upon the beautiful world which he is about to leave ; but the instant that the dagger is withdrawn, death fills the vacuum it has made, and the destruction is complete.

As I laid my head upon the pillow that night, I began to marvel what would be the result

four second meeting on the morrow. There must necessarily be some moment during the day in which we should find ourselves alone; when the restraint under which we had passed the previous evening would be removed; and when he would be at liberty to pour out to me all his regrets, his sufferings, and his reproaches. How should I justify myself? How should I excuse my weakness, my vacillation, my infidelity? Then came the question of ought I to do so, even to him? Ought I to admit that I became the wife of Sir James solely by coercion? That I went to the altar a loveless bride? That I had carried his image in my heart, while my hand was clasped in that of Dornton? How would he receive such an avowal? In what position should I myself stand after so humiliating a revelation?

Ere I at length slept I came to the decision, which those who have studied my character with attention will at once have foreseen. I resolved to leave all to chance, and to be decided by circumstances.

It was cutting through the Gordian Knot. When Joséphine appeared with my chocolate the following morning, I chid her for having suffered me to sleep so late; and she excused herself by asserting that, confident that the noise of *Monsieur's* departure must have disturbed *Miladi*, she

supposed that *Miladi* had afterwards desired to rest, as she had not rung her bell.

“*Monsieur’s* departure !” I exclaimed in surprise ; “ who has left Rooksley this morning ?”

“ *Monsieur* Devereux is gone, *Miladi* ; and Sir James has accompanied him to the post-town on horseback.”

“ Did Colonel Devereux receive letters by the early post ?” I asked anxiously.

Joséphine could not inform me. The letter bag had, as usual, been carried to Lord Otterford ; and having ascertained that it contained nothing for me, she had not waited to see its contents distributed. I felt as though I had been hurled from a height : I was stunned with mortification and surprise. No, no ; I had deceived myself. Devereux had ceased to love me ; and my levity of the previous evening had excited his contempt. I was miserable.

All these may appear puerile details to those who care only for the broad outline of actions and events ; but such as love to study the intricate details of the human heart, and to unwind the tangled threads by which its impulses and passions are directed, will not so deem of them. Now, as I sit at my desk, with my hair grey, and my brow wrinkled, I feel convinced that had Devereux lent himself to the romantic folly by

which my own feelings were governed, his weakness would have worked my cure. I should have discovered among the adulating crowd by which I was generally surrounded, a score of individuals as handsome and as attractive as himself.

It is astonishing with what false tints solitude can invest a man. Had I a score of daughters, I would sooner trust their happiness to the whirl of a London life, under proper *chaperonage*, than to the quiet of the country with one ineligible suitor; just as, upon the same principle, I utterly dissent from the old and accepted axiom of the danger of a girl of fifteen or sixteen committing some foolish act, and requiring constant *surveillance* to keep her in the path of prudence. Every-day experience proves the fallacy of this time-worn assertion, which has been repeated so often that it is taken for granted without examination. As a general rule, a woman is never less likely to mar her own happiness than just as she makes acquaintance with the world. Idleness is the germ of all mischief in a woman's heart; and shew me the being more busy than a young girl just bursting into womanhood.

The great kaleidoscope of society is newly revealed to her, and she is never weary of watching its combinations. Her whole heart, her whole being, are in full activity: her moral vision,

although not obscured, is confused. She is full of aspirations, full of hopes; but, far from centering upon one solitary object, they are distributed and intertwined, and, as a natural consequence, negatived by their own discursiveness.

It is without a single dread of contradiction from those of my own sex who have passed through the two phases of existence under notice, that I declare my firm belief, that at no period does a woman do herself less justice, or dispose of her happiness more recklessly, than during the few years, while she is what our Gallic neighbours courteously term "on the return;" when, the bloom of early youth tarnished, the light figure become less buoyant, the hopes which once filled her heart crushed or evaporated—still feeling within herself all the faculties of happiness as freshly as she did ten years before—she sees the children whom she had petted in their nursery elbow her in the world's crowd, as her successors; and feels that the change, which to herself has been almost imperceptible, must be traced in indelible characters to those by whom she is surrounded. Then it is, that, as she thinks of the future—a future which can only deepen the decay, and increase the moral solitude of her own heart—she is unjust to herself. A morbid dread of utter abandonment by that world to

“I have been thinking of you
very much lately, and
wondering how you
are getting on. I hope you
are happy and
that you have
not got into any
trouble. I am
well, thank you,
and hope the same
for you. I am
not sure, but
I think I shall
be home in
a few days.
I shall be
glad to see
you when I
do.”

CHAPTER III.

The apparition of Devereux had made strange havoc in my peace of mind, as well as in my self-appreciation. It taught me at once to reflect and to doubt. Because I had listened with indifference to the flatteries of a score of fashionable coxcombs, I had quietly fallen into the belief that marriage had rendered me impenetrable to all attractions from without. I had never taken the trouble to reflect, that if the cowl could not make the monk, so neither could the ring make the matron.

I was awakened with a start to the fact. Whence had I derived my safety? Not from the presence of Sir James, but by the invisible potency of a deep, although smothered passion; and at what a mortifying moment did the truth burst upon me! Just as the novelty of our union wore away, Dornton was beginning to find it possible to derive amusement from pursuits in which I had

no share : to enjoy a bachelor's dinner at his club, and a bachelor's stall at the opera : a sporting party, or a boat-race. Not, be it understood, that I repined at this gradual and almost imperceptible change. Had I been less self-centred I might possibly have been wounded, because every handsome young woman imagines, when she marries, that she must inevitably work a revolution in matrimonial habits, and exhibit to the world a model husband, created by the magic of her individual charms. She forgets, poor fool ! that custom and possession never fail to rend the diadem from the brow of the divinity ; and that, not unfrequently, the most romantic lover degenerates into the most common-place partner.

In my case, I was spared this mortification, for I had so lively an opinion of my own merits that it was almost matter of indifference to me ; although, suddenly aroused to a perception of the fact, the conviction became fatal in another way. I began to remember the circumstances under which I had become a wife : to ask myself wherein I had profited by the alliance which had been thrust upon me ; to contrast my seventeen summers with the forty well-told years of Dornton ; to dwell upon the *éclat* which my beauty and fashion had thrown around the *blasé* man of the world, and the consequence which my large

fortune—for even this baneful reflection of money came at last—had obtained for him among his associates.

I looked at Lord Otterford, and thought how widely the past differed from the present; and with what charming indifference Lady Madelaine had supported the change. The world was with her, and the world's plaudits were the one great ambition of her life. She was not dependent on home. So long as all wore a surface of intact and irreproachable polish, she cared little how cold and ungenial might be the under-current.

This was at least a convenient, if not an encouraging temper of mind, and could I have attained to it, I should at once have dismissed the subject from my thoughts; but such was far from being the case. As the image of Sir James paled and diminished in my mental vision, that of Devereux brightened and expanded to fill up the vacant space; and I flung aside the hard penetrating chisel of reality, to assume the soft and facile pencil of fancy.

Full of youth, and love, and noble aspirations, still upon the threshold of that life into whose inner temples Sir James had already penetrated, what violent contrasts could I not create in my own mind, between the lover of my choice, and the husband of my fate! These are the weak

speculations, the idle comparisons, by which women lose their dignity of character ; and I spent hours in creating and instituting them ; nor did the circumstances of Devereux's sudden departure make me less ingenious in this self-torture. I had come back upon the conviction that he still loved me, and I consequently attributed his abrupt retreat to fear. Here I might have paused, and asked myself how I should receive so equivocal a compliment ; but I avoided the reference, and only clung to the fact.

The result of all this moral weakness was an increased indifference to Sir James, an added appreciation of my own merits, and a restless anxiety respecting the movements of Devereux.

Company crowded to Rooksley. Lady Madeline had wearied of the pastoral picture of the family group, upon which she had expatiated so gracefully amid the throngs of London ; while I, fully occupied by my own visions, had never breathed a wish for change. The men, when they returned to the saloon after dinner, played high, and discussed political questions ; the women flirted and passed in review the personal and moral merits of their absent friends ; and I believe that few of these could have complained with justice of being forgotten.

In these evenings at Rooksley I learnt one

fact which I have ever since retained, and of which the experience of each succeeding year has sufficed more fully to convince me; that when a woman emancipates herself deliberately alike from charity and from decency, it costs her no effort to be a wit; nor need she open her mouth without giving utterance to something brilliant. I leave it to casuists to decide which of the two sisters of the fairy-tale she most resembles—the one who spoke gold and diamonds, or the other, who cast forth toads and vipers: I only know that many a woman's—I was about to say *reputation*, but I retract the word, and substitute—celebrity, has depended, and does to my knowledge depend, in the present day, upon what the French have wittily called a *flux de mots*—the one more unfeminine than the other.

But, *vogue la galère!* I am talking of others, and forgetting that my legitimate subject is myself. It may be remembered that Sir James had tranquillised my mind, even before our marriage, on the subject of his utter want of jealousy; and I am bound to admit that he acted in accordance with his professions. Whether he had so truly read the secret of my heart, or so utterly despised the weakness of my nature, that he calmly committed me to the safeguard of my

vanity, it is needless now to inquire, while it is certain that he saw all the idle guests of Lady Madelaine at my feet without comment or expostulation. I laughed more than once in my secret thoughts, as I found myself playing the same rôle in the Rooksley saloon which my mother had played during my early girlhood, and which I had looked upon with envy. I had, as a natural consequence, brought with me to the country all the *prestige* of my success in town; and I played the *beauté par excellence* without mercy or misgiving. My mother's forbearance was wonderful. She had necessarily fallen back into a *demi jour* which it must have been difficult to tolerate, yet she did not seem to see it; and, satisfied with the adoration of her own immediate circle, she left to me alike the triumph and the trouble of forming a bright centre to the general group.

Such was the state of things when I suddenly remembered Lady O'Halloran; and I had no sooner done so than I directed Joséphine to dispatch a messenger to the hall without delay, to ascertain if the family were in the country. I was seated in my dressing-room when the memory of the kind-hearted old lady rose up before me like a reproach, and with it were linked a thousand associations and a thousand regrets. What would the

single-hearted, honestly-minded friend of my father now think of the dissipated, reckless Lady Dornton? Would she look on me with pity, or with blame? Had I been wicked as well as weak, the question would have given me no uneasiness; for good old Lady O'Halloran existing, with the tithe of an establishment, in the empty and echoing hall of her husband's ancestors, in order to preserve his memory from dishonour, and the fortunes of her son from ruin, was an object very unlikely to interest that world of which I had now become a votary. But the spell of the past was over her; and, as was habitual with me, her good opinion was essential to my comfort and self-appreciation. Here was another hope of help, though I could not have explained the manner in which it was to be rendered available.

That Lady O'Halloran had not appeared at Rooksley, by no means implied her absence from the country. Lady Madelaine's greeting on a former occasion had been prohibitory of all further intercourse; and the old lady was too high-hearted to incur the risk of a renewed affront. I therefore awaited with considerable interest the return of my messenger; and had no sooner ascertained that Lady O'Halloran was indeed in the neighbourhood, than I ordered my carriage,

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finger of renovation had been so busy that I scarcely recognized the details which met my eye.

Within, as without, the same change had taken place; while the bevy of powdered menials who received me, and who replaced the one grey-headed domestic who had served Lady O'Halloran with all the stately affection of long habit, were clothed in neat, but rich liveries. I forgot the lapse of time which had intervened since my last visit to the Hall, and looked around me in astonishment.

I was shewn into the library, which, like the rest of the establishment, had assumed an air of opulence and comfort; and where I was courteously received by a stranger, the veriest vision of girlish beauty upon which I had ever looked. Small and slight as a sylph, her eyes were of the deepest blue, and the magnificent masses of hair that fell around her face, and to her shoulders, were of that golden brown which flashes in the sunshine, and darkens in the shade; the smile that played upon her lips appeared habitual to them; and as she rose upon my entrance, and courteously motioned me to the seat which a servant had advanced, I thought that I had never beheld so perfect an embodiment of innocence, sweetness, and polished grace. She was evidently as young

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 fact that the
 majority of the
 respondents
 reported that
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 study were not
 statistically significant.
 This is a common
 finding in studies
 of this type, and
 it is likely that
 the results of the
 study were not
 statistically significant
 due to the small
 sample size.

welcome to the Hall?" she asked, as she extended her hand with a gravity which was not habitual to her.

"One and both, my good friend!" I exclaimed, rising to carry the offered hand to my lips. "Eveleen who comes to thank you for your past friendship, and Lady Dornton who ventures to ask for its continuance."

"So far, so well;" was the reply; "and in this proceeding, and the feeling by which it is dictated, I recognise the prompting of the well-meaning but unstable heart of my poor friend Tilden's daughter. You are welcome, Eveleen, very welcome in both characters. I have often thought of you with affection and anxiety, my dear child. And now let me make known to you the wife of my son; the beloved Margaret, who has become as dear to me as her husband; and who has, by her tenderness, given an added value to the close of my struggling and stormy life."

I almost uttered an exclamation of surprise as the beautiful young creature before me bowed and smiled her greeting. All was now explained. It was evident that her wealth had restored the faded honours of the ancient family of which she had become a member; that her extreme loveliness had not been her only dowry; and that beneath the sweet simplicity by which I had been

impressed, must nestle the proud consciousness of having shed happiness and peace upon the path of him she loved.

What a contrast did she not offer to myself! We were both young, both wealthy, both handsome; but hers was not the commanding and almost arrogant beauty which distinguished me; it was a loveliness, so pure, so ethereal, so spiritualized, that all idea of rivalry was annihilated as by the stroke of a magician's wand; and I felt no reluctance in admitting the charm under which I bowed.

"And thus, Eveleen;" pursued Lady O'Halloran, when our mute but cordial recognition was accomplished; "I have subsided into a happy, indolent, world-shunning dowager; and have little to tell you of myself; but such is far from being the case with you. Are you still sufficiently unspoiled by fashion to open your heart to me? Nay, do not leave us, my child;" she said, as the younger Lady O'Halloran rose to leave the room: "you are aware that there is not now between us even the affectation of a secret. And you, my dear Lady Dornton, fear nothing: Margaret is discreet; and I will even admit to you that she is *au courant* of your early history, and has more than once shed tears over my simple story of your unloved youth."

I instinctively stretched out my hand to the fair girl, who pressed it gently in silence.

How easy was it for me to pour forth to the sympathising listeners near me all the history of my strange, hurried, and compulsory marriage. The threats of my mother, my terror of Mr. Curties, my gratitude for the attentions of Sir James. Nay, how comparatively facile was it to admit the vacillation of my own feelings; the uncertainty by which I was beset; the chimerical fears under which I laboured; and even the deplorable weakness which accompanied me to the altar! I narrated with a glowing cheek, my triumphs in the world, and the splendour with which Sir James had surrounded me in my new home. Fevered and breathless, I passed on from one phase of my married life to another; until my eloquence was suddenly checked by the memory of the late apparition of Devereux at Rooksley.

When the time is come in which we fear to give utterance to all the secrets of our hearts, the very effort that we make to shroud them reveals the mystery; and thus it was with me. I had been talking hurriedly, impetuously, as though the hours would be too short to hold all that I had to tell, when suddenly I stopped short, with a forced laugh; and folding my mantle about me

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of Sir James Dornton's love, a subject of indifference—even a relief to you? Have you not allowed yourself to look upon your marriage as a martyrdom inflicted upon you by others, when you should have remembered that by proper and prudent firmness, and calm womanly dignity, you might have rendered it impossible? Have you not sacrificed the peace and self-respect of the future to the indolent enjoyment of the present? I understand that gesture. You admit the fact. But is this all, Eveleen? Is this all, poor misguided child of my dead friend? Throughout the whole of your story, you have told me only of yourself and of those who were antagonistical to you—I have not heard one word of Herbert Devereux—of the object of your first, and as you declared, of your unalterable love. Why is this? Have you in truth conquered your girlish, and now sinful passion? Have you never met Mr. Devereux since your marriage?"

"But once; Madam; but once, and then only for a few hours, scarcely a week since, at Rooksley."

"And what has been the moral effect of that meeting, Eveleen?"

"Lady O'Halloran!" I exclaimed in agony; "have mercy upon me! I cannot answer that question to my own heart. I can only promise

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experiences this retorted falsehood, neither can I pity him when he is repaid in kind."

"Eveleen, you make me shudder?"

"And wherefore? Of what value can be the devotion of a wife when it is not deemed worthy of return? Rather desire for me, my dear Lady O'Halloran, a state of mind which will substitute calm, for an impossible and unattainable happiness. The world need know nothing of the fact. How, indeed, in my case, could it arrive at such a conclusion? I feel that Sir James will never fail in his duty as a well-bred and perfectly courteous husband; that he will replace the passion which he is tired of affecting, by the most conspicuous attentions, the most unlimited indulgence, and the most demonstrative respect. The world will not therefore, I repeat, suspect the shallowness of the vase which contains my draught of home-happiness; and to that world I confidently look to revenge me."

I was abruptly silenced by the fixed and frightened gaze which the younger Lady O'Halloran had turned upon me, and which I accidentally encountered. It was as the look of a good genius, rebuking an evil spirit. I bowed my head, humbled and heart-struck, before the wondering purity which, wounded and bewildered, seemed to ask itself if it had heard aright.

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excitement. Do not judge harshly of me; my fate has been a cruel one. If I can conquer it in conquering myself, I shall in a great degree owe my success to your admonitions. Farewell."

"Farewell, my child. Be just to yourself, and all will yet end happily."

My heart was full, as I threw myself into the carriage. It is full now, as I recal that never-forgotten visit. The aspect of the pure and gentle girl, who, like a beam of sunshine had crossed my feverish and fitful path; the moral worth of the friend in whom my father had confided; the calm and peaceful look of every thing by which they were surrounded, as though their own qualities were reflected by all about them; these objects which, in a different frame of mind, would have imparted to my own feelings a portion of their blessedness, now only served, on the contrary, to ruffle and embitter my pride and my repinings. Such also might have been my fate. What was it now? And what might it become?

I reached Rooksley in time to dress for dinner, and to learn from Joséphine that Colonel Devereux had returned.

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mitted some reckless act of folly which would have drawn down upon me the reproaches of Lady Madelaine, and the remonstrances, or even displeasure of Sir James; but far from affecting to do so, his coldness and indifference were unconquerable; he scarcely appeared conscious of my presence when I was putting forth all the artillery of my fascinations. He neither smiled at my sallies, nor was moved by my complaints; indeed, I might have believed that he had altogether forgotten the former tie between us, had not the pertinacity with which he avoided every occasion of finding himself alone with me, been a convincing proof to the contrary. This was, of all positions in the world, the most trying to a vain and flattered woman, conscious that time had only heightened her attractions. The obsequious devotions of the frivolous and fashionable men about me became vapid and distasteful. I sought only for the admiration and homage of the one who seemed resolved to deny me both; and I became but the more determined to lay the rebellious spirit.

To the society of Dornton, Colonel Devereux was obviously averse; and it appeared to me somewhat singular that Sir James should force it upon him with so much pertinacity, knowing as he did all the antecedents of his history; such

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To lose our conquests, is a fate to which we must all, sooner or later, submit with as good a grace as we can assume. It is the penalty of the one sex, enforced by the selfishness and fickleness of the other; but to confess to ourselves that we have done so, is a harder task than many women can achieve, even in the face of the clearest evidence. Hence so many superannuated coquettes!

Something more bitter than anger made me resolve to ascertain the fact. I determined to leave no pains untried to ascertain the real state of Devereux's feeling towards me. Had I possessed as much principle as pride, I should have shrunk from such an inquisition: but I have already frankly acknowledged that mine were only the principles which are commonly acquired in the great world, and which seldom interfere with the will of their possessor. They are like a rootless oak, making a noble shew until resistance is required of them; but once lean upon them for support, and they give way, and roll their leafy honours in the dust.

I pursued my resolution. I affected the tastes which I knew to be agreeable to my lost lover. I wore the colours he preferred, I avoided the habits which I chanced to hear him condemn; but all was useless. He neither looked nor com-

mented. My ill-success made me nervous and irritable. It was a struggle which I was compelled to bear alone, for I dared not confess to any one the extent of my vain and guilty folly. This fact doubled my suffering; for, naturally expansive, I should have found a certain solace in pouring out all my hopes, and fears, and weakness, to another. The enervating atmosphere of an unbroken solitude of spirit is to that spirit like constant tension to a bow: the spring of each becomes injured by the useless and unprofitable strain upon its strength. Thus it was with me; constantly striving to effect one object, and constantly foiled in my attempts, my temper at last gave way, and I became sullen and imperious.

Dornton expostulated with me. My answer was haughty and impatient. I expected that I should compel a retort, but it was not so. He only smiled compassionately, as he would have done at an exhibition of impotent anger in a spoiled child, and this civil contempt exasperated me. I reproached him with his indifference to my happiness, and even shed tears. I pitied myself that I had become the wife of a man too old to enter into my tastes, or to comprehend my feelings; I profited, in short, by this unpremeditated outburst, to pour forth the full tide of my pent-up emotions; but Dornton remained placidly by my

side, unmoved by all the extravagance of my accusations.

“Listen to me, Eveleen ;” he said at last, “and endeavour to recover your good-humour, without which even your pretty face loses its charm. Look at me ! Despite all your reproaches—and you have not spared them—I have remained calm. I am, as you have truly said, too old to enter into your feelings, though I perhaps understand them even better than yourself ; and it is precisely because I am so much your senior that I cannot afford to hurry on the destructive progress of time, by the withering blight of temper. I am, as you know, a man of the world, and I owe it to that world to be careful of its worshipper. Look at me !” he repeated, assuming an air of playfulness : “Why do you turn away your eyes so impatiently ? What ! a blush, which is not timidity but anger—what means all this ?”

I disdained to answer. Sir James drew a chair forward, and seated himself beside me.

“We are in a ridiculous position, Eveleen ;” he continued after a short pause ; “and one which I would fain have treated more lightly than you now compel me to do. As it is, I will be as serious, if not as energetic as yourself, for we have, in truth, a grave subject to discuss.”

I shrugged my shoulders, and threw myself

back upon my cushions. I was resolved not to yield an inch.

“To be candid with you, my dear girl;” pursued my husband, as calmly as though he had been giving an account of his day’s shooting; “you have acted very absurdly of late; and if you are not more careful you will compromise yourself terribly. You should consider the imprudence of your system. If you are compromised at your age, you will be superannuated at five-and-twenty; and for what? Nothing, or less than nothing.”

I looked up aghast.

“I am quite aware,” he resumed in the same monotonous and unexcited voice: “that the unexpected appearance of a man whom you have loved, and not yet quite forgotten, must necessarily be a trial to you; but you should struggle against so unprofitable a weakness, for your own sake; you should avoid drawing upon yourself the attention of those about you by exhibitions of sullenness and absence of mind; you should have more command over yourself, and more consideration for your husband.”

“You insult me!” I exclaimed passionately.

“Impossible;” was the reply; “for I do not wrong you. Eveleen, in all that relates to knowledge of the world you are still a child. Devereux has piqued your pride; he has overacted his

part, and you have emulated him in his folly. There must be an end to this."

"Have you forgotten having once gratuitously informed me that you were not jealous!"

"Jealous!" repeated Dornton, in a tone that would have been contemptuous, had it not been dashed with pain. "And I told you the truth, Lady Dornton. Had it been otherwise—but that is not what I wish to say. You require the counsels of a friend interested in your respectability and happiness; and I am ready to offer them."

"The office of a Mentor is doubtlessly more agreeable to you than that of a husband;" I said bitterly; "but I will not impose upon you so onerous a task, as that of teaching your wife to disguise her sentiments and play the hypocrite, in order to preserve her honour from the malice of envenomed tongues."

"My anxiety to save you simply proves that I am a rational being; that I foresee the dangers to which your imprudence exposes you; and that I wish to do you a service by preserving your reputation, which, once blighted, can never be restored. Were you more reasonable than you are, I should speak more plainly; but, as it is, we should never understand each other."

"I have already understood too much;" I exclaimed indignantly. "You have said with truth,

Sir, that you are a man of the world ; but, knowing this, why did you marry ? Why did you place a helpless woman in a position to blush alike for you and for herself ?”

“ I will not recriminate ;” said Dornton, with a taunting smile ; “ and I will add no more than this. You are entering upon a dangerous career, of which the perils are unknown to you, and of which I possess the clue. I have offered to guide you safely through the labyrinth, and you reproach me for the offer. Would you prefer that I should watch your actions, and listen to your words, in order to discover in them subject of suspicion and discord ?—that I should embitter both your life and my own by a ceaseless and senseless jealousy ?”

“ Yes ;” I replied angrily ; “ yes, Sir, I should prefer it a thousand times. Your very injustice would be a proof of affection ; and anything is preferable to indifference.”

“ You are a little goose !” laughed Sir James ; “ you neither know what you say, nor what you wish. The day will yet come, in which you will congratulate yourself upon what you now consider a subject of complaint. Appearances, Eveleen, appearances are the current coin of the world. Watch over them, as the miser watches his hoarded gold. You have wit enough to compre-

hend that, so long as you can flaunt them in the face of society, your dear five hundred friends will care little for what lies beneath. You are warned—be wary!”

And at the close of this extraordinary and revolting harangue, Sir James rose from his seat, and with an “*addio, bellissima!*” left the room, before I could sufficiently recover myself to utter a word in reply.

I felt stunned. My conviction of the lax morality of my husband had come upon me so suddenly that I was crushed; but, after a time, there rose upon the ruins of the respect and gratitude which I had hitherto entertained for him, an emotion of the most withering contempt. This is the most hopeless of all feelings towards a husband. Every other adverse sentiment may be obliterated, or at least ameliorated by time; but contempt is like rust in such a case; the longer it grows, the deeper it eats into the metal, and the more impossible it becomes to remove its trace.

I was no longer a wife in heart, and Dornton was not long in discovering my coldness, but he made no comment upon my conduct. Meanwhile, in the eyes of the world, we were a singularly well-assorted couple, and worthy of envy. We never interfered with each other's avocations or amusements; we were wealthy, and regardless of

expense ; I was young, fashionable, and admired ; Sir James popular and witty. What more could be desired ? Who cared what might lurk behind the veil, which like that upon the altar of Vesta, hid the secrets of the oracle ? As my contempt for Sir James deepened, so did my passion for Devereux increase. I became alarmed at last, and tried to believe that I was deluding myself with a spectre, and that when he left Rooksley I should once more cease to be occupied so entirely by one object ; but I could not maintain the cheat. The return of his regard was necessary to my happiness ; and I eventually came to a compromise with my conscience, and decided that it would suffice to me to secure him hereafter as a friend—only a friend—we could never again be more to each other than friends—but this, at least, we might, and must be. The more I reflected upon this subject, the more distinctly I saw not only the propriety, but even the expediency of the arrangement. We were at present in a false position. Our former attachment was no secret ; and what did our present marked estrangement imply ? The world is censorious. Might it not misinterpret so extraordinary a demonstration of avoidance ? I eagerly answered myself in the affirmative. We accept so readily all sophistries which flatter our own wishes.

My resolution was formed. Devereux must be made to comprehend this truth. So far all was easy : but how to effect my purpose was still the question. Lady Madelaine had affected not to perceive the coldness which existed between us ; it was consequently evident that she was satisfied with the present state of things, and that no assistance could be expected from her. The mediation of Sir James was equally hopeless, for he would have made the first hint at such an arrangement the subject of a distasteful jest. I could come to no decision.

An expedition to some ruins in the neighbourhood had been suggested by Lord Otterford, and eagerly seconded by the guests, when it chanced that on the morning chosen for the excursion, I awoke fevered and unwell, and found myself compelled to decline so fatiguing an attempt at amusement. The party consequently departed without me, leaving a few civil regrets to replace their society. As I heard the carriages roll from the door, I rejoiced in my temporary solitude ; and felt so much relieved by the reflection that I should be alone with my own thoughts for a few hours, that after luxuriating for a time in this conviction, I resolved to rise, and wander through the park. I accordingly made a hasty and care-

less toilette, and folding my shawl about me, left my room.

As I descended the stairs it struck me that I should do well to provide myself with a book, that, when weary of my own society, I might be sure of a resource; and I accordingly turned towards the library for that purpose. The door stood open, and I had advanced some steps into the room before I became conscious that it was already tenanted. The blood rushed to my heart. Devereux was seated at a small reading-table, placed in the bay of the window. His left hand supported his head, and in his right he held a pen; but he was not writing; he was buried in thought.

“Pray pardon me, Colonel Devereux;” I said hurriedly, “I was not aware that you were here.”

My voice roused him from his reverie; he rose precipitately, and advanced to meet me like a person suddenly awakened from a deep sleep, who had not yet recovered the control of his actions.

“You have not then been tempted to join the exploring party?” I said, endeavouring to conceal my agitation.

“No, Madam.”

“And why?”

“What interest could I have taken in an excursion whose —— but you doubtlessly came here in search of something. Can I be useful?”

“Yes, Colonel Devereux; you can join me in a stroll through the park. I was about to take a book as a companion. I will accept your society as its substitute.”

He bowed without making any reply; caught up his hat, offered his arm, and in the next instant we had left the house. For the first few moments we walked forward in silence. Then we talked of the wind, the heat, the picturesque grouping of the forest timber—the tame state of the waterfowl upon the lake,—and while we held this puerile conversation, I felt his arm tremble as it supported mine, and my own heart beat as though it would fain have made its pulsations audible.

Once or twice I almost met his eye as it was hastily averted from my face, and I felt glad of this, for I was conscious that in my simple cambric wrapper, and my close straw bonnet, I must remind him more thoroughly of the Eveleen of former times—the Eveleen whom he had loved—than in the elaborate toilette which I had affected since my marriage. Still, however, he continued

silent, or only replied to my observations by a monosyllable. At length I could endure this chilling constraint no longer. My resolution rose up before me, and I determined to take the initiative, since it was evident that he had decided on an opposite course of action.

“Colonel Devereux;” I said, with all the calmness which I found it possible to assume; “we have sufficiently discussed both the weather and the beauties of Rooksley; and now we can surely find some more interesting subject of conversation. We are not strangers. Let us be frank towards each other. Why are we so thoroughly estranged? You, without doubt, consider the past more harshly than—perhaps—”

“I have never reproached you, Lady Dorton?”

“You have not. But it is possible that I should have preferred even your reproaches to the cold and cutting displeasure and avoidance that you have exhibited.”

“Have I, indeed, made a parade of such feelings? If so, I owe your Ladyship an apology for my presumption, and venture to offer it at once.”

Tears of mortification started to my eyes.

“Colonel Devereux;” I said somewhat bitterly; “as this is a subject to which we must never

again recur, let us, at least understand each other now. You are strangely altered, and I fear that I have been in some degree the cause of a change which all who regard you must deplore. Believe me that, however circumstances may appear to condemn me—”

“ Pray spare alike yourself and me, Lady Dornton. You did not deceive me, I deceived myself. I knew enough of the pliability of your nature to be prepared for all that has occurred. Had it been otherwise, nothing should have induced me to play so supine a part as I have enacted since our separation. Had I been able to trust to your firmness, and to calculate on your co-operation, I would have sacrificed my whole life in the struggle to obtain your hand; but this necessary faith was denied to me; and I was too proud to pursue the heiress, when I was not secure of the affections of the woman.”

“ Is this generous, Colonel Devereux ?”

“ I think so ; I should be sorry were it otherwise. Am I not borne out in my argument ?”

“ Can we not forget the past, and be friends ?”

“ In the eyes of the world ? Undoubtedly ; although the attempt will appear but a mockery to ourselves.”

“ In that case let us leave it untried ;” I exclaimed, as the blood mounted to my brow ; “ I

know not why I am weak enough to hope that my forlorn and cruel destiny can be changed. I should be grateful to you, Colonel Devereux, for completing the bitter lesson which I have studied since my childhood."

"Lady Dornton! Eveleen!" cried Devereux, suddenly grasping my hand; "are you the only victim of the destiny which you deprecate?"

There was an expression in his voice that startled me. I had weakly and wilfully placed myself in a dangerous position. I had advanced to the brink of the precipice knowingly and recklessly; and now, when I felt the ground giving way under my feet, I trembled.

"Listen to me:" I said hurriedly; "before you reject my proffered friendship. You are unhappy; you have fits of melancholy, which are not natural either to your age or to your temperament. Need I tell you that I also have my hours of bitterness? The idle triflers by whom we are surrounded have no sympathy with sorrow; they do not guess how grief is sometimes lightened by participation. Like the ephemera that sport in the sunbeams, they disappear on the setting of the brightness to which they owe their being. But we are not like these; let us be friends: the trials of the one will be lessened by sympathy in those of the other.—You look surprised—indig-

nant—What can there be in such a proposition to induce either wonder or annoyance?”

“All—Lady Dornton; everything—I congratulate you upon the composure with which you can contemplate the arrangement: I, unfortunately, do not possess an equal share of self-government. I have, indeed, compelled myself to meet you daily, almost hourly, and even to reside under the same roof with you—but my stoicism will scarcely extend farther.”

“I am to understand then, Colonel Devereux, that henceforth, save in the interchange of the formalities of society, we are to be strangers?”

“We have no alternative.”

I was confounded. There was a shade of sorrow in his accent which checked the words that were rising to my lips, and I instinctively stood still. Devereux paused also, but remained silent. I had withdrawn my hand from his arm; and in order to disguise my agitation I began to tear away the leaves of a shrub beside me. I might have spared myself the subterfuge; for when I at length turned once more towards my companion, he was tracing figures upon the gravel with his cane, as if unconsciously. I felt the necessity of extrication from this self-sought dilemma.”

“After your last assertion,” I said; “I can no longer affect ignorance of your estimate of my

character. All further discussion is needless. When I requested your society, I did not anticipate insult; and, least of all, that insult should reach me through you."

"Insult, Lady Dornton! Insult!—are you making a jest of my struggle to act worthily?"

"Enough, Colonel Devereux, enough;" I interposed with vehemency, "there was no possibility of mistaking your words. And you are right, Sir, perfectly right. I have within the last hour heedlessly given you, through a romantic fancy that friendship still existed in the world, an opportunity of misconstruction from which it is your pleasure not to suffer me to escape unscathed;—my idle dream is now, however, over; and henceforth I will compel you to respect me."

As I ceased speaking, I bent my head haughtily, and turned towards the house.

"Lady Dornton—Eveleen—You will drive me mad!" exclaimed Devereux, seizing my shawl to detain me; "do you not—can you not—understand, that I dare not accept the offer of your friendship—of your confidence—dear and precious as it would be to me? Will you not believe me incapable of indulging a thought which would give you pain? No—you cannot; you do not seek to do this, because you can reason calmly

upon the past, and look steadily upon the present. I can do neither; and of this you make a crime."

My heart beat quick; my brow burned; my shawl was still in his grasp.

"You are enigmatical, Colonel Devereux;" I remarked coldly, making a second attempt to escape.

"Eveleen—merciless Eveleen—do not abuse your power. You have already made me sufficiently wretched. Spare me now."

"We are both acting childishly;" I said, affecting not to remark his emotion; "and have each something to forgive in this interview."

"Much, much;" murmured Devereux in a smothered voice. Then, suddenly turning towards me, he added; "let me, at least, make expiation for my errors. Let me assure you, Lady Dornton, solemnly assure you, that in all the words which I have uttered this day, there has not been one of which the true meaning was calculated to offend you; and then let me add that I now crave, humbly and earnestly, the proffered friendship which I was just now mad enough to reject. I will learn of yourself to exercise it with honour and usefulness. Will you not give me your hand?"

I felt that I should have refused to make so sudden a concession, but I could not. All my anger, all my alarm, gave way before the low and earnest tones in which he had addressed me. I laid my hand in his ; he carried it respectfully to his lips ; and then once more drew it through his arm, and turned to pursue the path which led onward towards the lake. It was a moment fraught with agitation to both of us. To me it was one of mingled bitterness and triumph ; I felt that I was still beloved ! The conviction should have made me tremble, but I was too confident in myself to fear. I only whispered mentally, that all the authority of my mother, and all the machinations of my husband, had merely sufficed to sever our hands—over our hearts they had possessed no power !

Meanwhile, as we slowly walked forward in silence, I felt the arm of Devereux press my hand more closely to his side. He, I thought is, perhaps, at this moment exulting over the same conviction ; and I longed to ask him if it were not so ; but a feeling of constraint and irresolution had come upon me, and I dared not trust myself with words, although the silence had continued so long, that it had become painful and embarrassing. At length, perceiving that my

companion was resolved to render me no assistance, I was about to attempt a renewal of the conversation, when the sound of approaching wheels announced the return of the party, and we at once hastened towards the house.

CHAPTER V.

Lord Otterford, shortly after his return home, opened the letter-bag, and among others, handed a somewhat voluminous packet to myself. My surprise was great to find the superscription in the hand-writing of Lady O'Halloran, while the post-mark which it bore was that of Edinburgh. A fortnight had scarcely elapsed since my visit to the Hall, upon which occasion she had made no mention of such a journey. Still painfully agitated by my interview with Devereux, I was glad to retreat to a distant sofa with my letter, marvelling as I crossed the room, what it might portend. It was dated from Glenfillan. My sister was a confirmed and hopeless invalid; and by one of those caprices so usual with the sick, she had written to entreat the presence of Lady O'Halloran in Scotland. The warm-hearted dowager had at once complied with her request; and had obeyed her wishes to the letter, by leaving the neighbourhood

without informing any of the family of her movements; but, on her arrival at Glenfillan had found Adela so greatly changed, that she considered it her duty to apprise me of the fact; and also to insist that Lady Flora should write to my mother to the same effect.

“My poor sister is dangerously ill!” I exclaimed, when I had reached the close of the letter, and approached Lady Madelaine. “Have you also heard from Glenfillan, Madam?”

“Yes, I have a letter from Lady Flora; she appears to be uneasy about Adela; but old maids always exaggerate evils, and consequently—”

“I assure you,” I interposed eagerly; “that there is scarcely room for exaggeration. Lady O’Halloran, who is at present with her, assures me that she has wasted to a shadow; that her physician is almost fearful of administering remedies lest they should consume her slight remains of strength, and that she pertinaciously rejects all his advice.”

“Ha! indeed—that intelligence is more serious,” replied my mother, looking more annoyed than anxious. “Lady O’Halloran’s judgment is not, however, infallible. What on earth could have taken that extraordinary person to Glenfillan! Some people are inexplicable. Adela is always

complaining, and creating a sensation in the family. Girls of her age are for ever fancying themselves dying, when they are only fostering their own absurd whims. However, Lady Flora will, of course, write again immediately, and if she does not announce any amendment in your sister's health, I must consider what to do."

The idea of sickness and death was so repugnant to me, that I am afraid, under other circumstances, I should have endeavoured to share my mother's comfortable self-consolation; but the intelligence had come upon me in a moment of agitation and anxiety, and I felt relieved by the tears which it enabled me to shed. Bad news are almost welcome in such a case, for they form a pretext for the emotion which must otherwise provoke both curiosity and comment; and we consequently feel no inclination to rob them of their just tribute. I wept bitterly, and for a time I cheated myself into the belief that all my tears were shed for my sister. I was no sooner alone, however, than I discovered the fallacy of such a credence, for my thoughts at once reverted to Devereux.

Our recent interview had again plunged me into a state of uncertainty. He had said too much, or not enough. In reviewing my own conduct I was not altogether satisfied, while his

appeared to be capricious and enigmatical. I *dared* not examine too closely the meaning of all his words, and I resolutely dwelt only upon such as might imply either affection, anger, or jealousy, as they were differently interpreted by his listener. I forgot to ask myself what warrant he had for either towards Sir James Dornton's wife.

A few days brought us, as Lady Madelaine had anticipated, fresh letters from Glenfillan.

"You will soon be sisterless;" wrote my own correspondent; "each day the disease, be it what it may, becomes more hopeless. Adela no longer looks like a creature of this world. Every tinge of blood has forsaken her cheeks and lips. She moves with difficulty, and cannot walk across the room without support. It is a sore trial to look upon her now, and to think what she might have been; but, for your worthy father's sake, to whom she will so soon be united, I will not leave her till all is over. As for herself, she is perfectly calm, and declares that she desires nothing so much as the moment which is to free her from a world of which she is weary, only on report."

Here then was frightful confirmation of our fears: and, despite the considerate declaration of Lady O'Halloran, that Adela looked forward to her death almost with impatience, I could not overcome the horror of the anticipation. I glanced

around me upon the luxury to which I was so habituated, that I should have heeded it only by its absence ; and then on the gushing sunshine which folded all nature in a robe of glory ; and lastly on the reflection of my own face, radiant in youth, and health, and beauty, and upon which the tears that were now trickling down, left no more trace than does a summer shower upon the blossoms and the leaves.

“ No, no ;” I murmured to myself ; “ she may bear her yoke bravely, but she cannot wish to leave all these. Poor Adela ! so young—scarcely nineteen—how terrible to be struck down, just as she might have learned to cherish life. Surely, surely, there must yet be hope !”

In her letter to my mother, Lady Flora mentioned that their guest had suggested to the invalid the expediency of requesting her presence and my own at Glenfillan, but the resolute manner in which she had replied “ Not yet,” had convinced them that we should do well to defer our journey for a time. As this arrangement accorded with Lady Madelaine’s wishes, she did not hesitate to express her acquiescence in their request, and all my own expostulations were useless.

The season had commenced ; and within a week after the receipt of this melancholy intel-

ligence, our party had dispersed only to meet again in town. One of my earliest guests was Devereux; but I was surrounded by morning visitors when he entered the room, and he did not await their departure. As he moved in precisely my own set, I, as a matter of course, met him every where; and although no opportunity of recurrence to our last conversation at Rookley offered itself, and that he was still guarded in his manner, and seldom ventured to shew me even those slight attentions, which when there exists no secret consciousness between the parties to lend them a language, signify little or nothing, still I felt that there was no longer so wide a gulf between us. My own house was the one in which he was the least frequently to be found; and he was always careful to come at those hours when, if I chanced to be at home, he was aware that I must be surrounded by guests. Into my Opera box he never ventured, unless he saw that I was attended by Sir James; and this soon became so unusual a circumstance, that I doubt if it were remarked when he dropped the habit altogether.

The *prestige* of the honeymoon was over. The Bride had become a Wife. Sir James was a member of three Clubs, where he could lounge all the morning, and play all the evening. And

it was pleasant to be assured that he had gained the plaudits of all his club-fellows by returning to them *unspoiled* by his marriage. It is always flattering to a wife to learn that she has worked no reform whatever in the habits of a dissipated husband !

Ere long, I saw little or nothing of Dornton. In the country he had merely fallen off in gallantry; in town he emancipated himself bodily from the thralldom of a married home. He liked to know that his house was frequented by all that was most desirable in London society, and that it was esteemed a favour to be received there as an *habitué* ; but he preferred to ascertain even this fact as news, to convincing himself of it personally.

There can be no doubt that my smothered affection for Devereux proved a safeguard to me at that period, and prevented the commission of more than one imprudence, into which my idle vanity would otherwise have hurried me. The language of adulation which met me on all sides, and at all times—the impotent malice of half-a-dozen fashionable beauties, whom I had, without one effort, bereft of their admirers—the giddy race of pleasure and frivolity which I was running—all conspired to intoxicate my fancy, and to delude my heart. Constant letters from the north had satisfied us that, although Adela was slowly

and surely sinking, there was no immediate danger of her dissolution; and, as she still resolutely refused to see either Lady Madelaine or myself, I was only too happy to be enabled to turn away from so melancholy a theme of thought, and to sun myself in brighter scenes.

My mother triumphed; five weeks had gone by since we left Rooksley, and Lady O'Halloran admitted, that although the decay of my sister's strength was certain, she had ceased to anticipate so early a result as she had at first looked for; while Lady Flora even talked at random of her youth being enabled ultimately to triumph over the languor under which she was suffering; in short, my mother began to complain, as new letters arrived, of the annoyance of these constant communications on a subject so unimportant as a fit of girlish vapours; they destroyed her comfort, and distracted her ideas. Her cause for complaint did not, however, endure much longer—she was not fated to have her nerves worn bare by the unnecessary croaking of two querulous old women—for thus did she always describe the evil under which she declared herself to be martyred. The suspense was not destined to be interminable; nor the martyrdom a lingering one.

While the season was at its height, Their Majesties signified their intention to visit Drury

Lane Theatre in state, and I in consequence assembled a party on the day fixed, the whole of whom were to proceed with me to witness the performance. As Sir James declined to participate in the project, my mother and Lord Otterford were among the guests, and our dinner was unusually gay. Lady Madelaine, in high beauty, and conscious of the fact, even exerted herself to fascinate and amuse; and, amid laughter, flattery, and coquetry we were just about to throw on our cloaks, and descend to the carriages, when a servant advanced towards me with a letter. I was about to waive him back, when I perceived upon the superscription the word "Immediate," and I saw at a glance that Lady O'Halloran was my correspondent. I seized the letter, and hurriedly tore it open:—"Eveleen"—thus it ran; "if you, indeed, wish once more to see your sister in this world, lose not a moment. She now entreats your presence, and that of her mother. Do not delay an hour, or you may arrive too late."

In my agitation and horror I read these few fatal lines aloud, and then I turned to ascertain their effect upon Lady Madelaine. For a moment she stood speechless and aghast, the jewels sparkling upon her pallid brow, and the velvet shivering above her trembling limbs; then, suddenly throwing herself upon a sofa, she buried

her face in her spread hands, and continued silent.

This silence alarmed me. Even overcome as I was by the sudden shock, I had been for so many years prepared for the most extraordinary proceedings on the part of my mother, where her own convenience and comfort were involved, that I augured ill of the pause which had followed so immediately upon the reading of this letter; and, fearful that she would disobey the summons, (strong in her horror of death, and her aversion to my dying sister,) I hastened to forestal her purpose, should she have contemplated such a refusal. I scarcely knew myself; I did not shed a tear; but calmly and earnestly I issued all the necessary orders for our immediate departure; and I was about to despatch messengers to the different clubs in search of Sir James, in order that he might accompany us on our journey, when Lord Otterford interposed:—

“It is useless, my dear Lady Dornton;” he said in an accent of perfect conviction; “Send to inform Sir James if you will, of your purposed departure; but make no arrangement for his own. He will not leave town upon such an errand.”

I was too much agitated at the moment to remark the singularity of this assertion. I only felt the awkwardness of the fact.

"Are we then to travel to the north alone?" I asked in some alarm.

"I will be your escort; but we must rouse your mother, in order that she may hasten home, and put on her travelling dress. We will be ready for you when you drive to the door."

During this short scene, which passed even more rapidly than it can be described, my guests had begun silently to depart, while Lady Madeleine still sat supine upon the sofa. Her face was so completely concealed, that it was impossible to decide under what nature or degree of emotion she was labouring. While Lord Otterford advanced towards her, I met the eyes of Devereux, who had been one of the last to retire. They were full of acute grief. Involuntarily I extended my hand towards him; and he held it for a moment as he murmured "Poor Eveleen, could not this, at least, have been spared to you?"

These few words unlocked the channel of my tears. As he left the room I looked after him in anguish. Would he have abandoned me at such a moment? Surely, surely, if I had wronged him, he was now revenged.

When my mother rose, and, leaning heavily upon the arm of Lord Otterford, prepared to leave the room, she was as pale as marble,

and trembled painfully; but there was a strange expression in her eye which made me shrink. It was evident that she had not shed a tear. She was about to pass me in silence, when I ventured to request that she would endeavour to rally her energies for our long and rapid journey; and to assure her that I would be in Grosvenor Square within the hour.

“I do not doubt it;” she replied in a harsh voice, totally unlike her usually musical accents. “You are evidently too eager for this ill-timed undertaking to throw any impediment in the way of its commencement; but you have been somewhat hasty in compromising me in so marked a manner, without waiting to ascertain, in the first place, my own pleasure upon the subject.”

“I thought, Madam, that you would not refuse the dying summons of my sister.”

“Perhaps so; but you should first have satisfied yourself of this fact, or have permitted me to issue my own orders. I do not believe that Adela has expressed a wish to see me. I am satisfied of the contrary. Old women are fond of scenes; it is their revenge upon the habitual monotony of their dreary existence. It is those about her who have committed this act of folly. However, thanks to your want of caution, I am now the

slave of circumstances, and must submit. Be at my door when you will, Lady Dorn-ton, you shall experience no delay through me."

After this unsatisfactory dialogue, she swept from the room, and I heard her drive off as I reached my own apartment. The more I pondered on her extraordinary conduct at such a crisis, the more inexplicable it appeared. I even doubted at times if she could indeed be the mother of Adela. I had, however, little leisure for mental speculation; the grumbling Joséphine augmented most carefully all the little difficulties of a prompt departure, and created a thousand unnecessary delays; but, despite all these, and the fact that the horses had been at the door above an hour before I could effect my departure, I saw nothing of Sir James. He had, probably, been engaged in a rubber of whist, or involved in a heavy stake at *rouge et noir*.

As I at last stepped into the carriage, I thought of Devereux, and sighed!

CHAPTER VI.

IN the midst of a vast and lofty chamber, hung with faded tapestry, and heavy with its ponderous cornices, its carved doors, and its gigantic mantel of dark oak, stood an antique bedstead of the same material, curtained with the voluminous folds of a crimson satin damask which had once been regal in its richness, but upon which the hand of time had long impressed its touch. These gloomy curtains were drawn aside to admit a flood of sunshine, which, after bathing a range of heathery hills in the distance, and making the surface of a far-off loch shimmer like a myriad of golden stars, came, glorious in the fulness of its power, to peer into that ancient room, and to invest it for one brief hour with all the brightness of which it had been bereft by the withering waste of a century.

That sun-flood fell upon antique porcelain and grotesque ornaments of another age, and without even a name in ours; while, strangely

blent with these, it threw out into broad relief a few plain, modern articles of usefulness, evidently selected without any regard either to their beauty or their luxury. A reading-chair, a desk, a book-case whose pigmy proportions were almost ludicrous in that spacious room, a few fine engravings in frames of ebony, but all expressive of some subject of suffering or terror, were among these. But not a flower, not an instrument of music, not a vestige of female occupancy could be discovered there; and yet, upon the damask-curtained bed, and fully exposed to all the fervour of the bright May sun, lay a pale girl, just at that lovely age when hope and joy should be the sister-twins of life. Her eyes were closed, but it was easy to see that they were not closed in sleep; her long hair was swept back from her brow, and was scattered like threads of gold over the pillow; her hands were tightly clenched above her head, and the long livid fingers looked as though they no longer retained strength to free themselves from their self-sought grasp. Her breathing was convulsive, and her hot breath had parched the thin blue lips through which it forced its passage; at times her features were distorted by a spasm of pain, and her eyes opened instinctively, but the transparent lids fell once more over them as the convulsion weakened.

Beside the bed knelt two aged women, one of whom was frantic in her grief; and who, had she not been restrained by her companion, would have disturbed, by her clamorous wailings, the silence of the death-room; the other, tearless, but bowed by sorrow, passed from time to time, with a gentle hand, a handkerchief across the brow of the dying girl, upon which dank drops of moisture gathered after every struggle.

“Adela, my love;” whispered this tender nurse, as she leant softly towards her, just as she had performed this careful office; “have you strength to bear the exertion? Your wish is granted; Lady Madelaine and your sister are here.”

The effect of this announcement was electrical. My sister—for it was indeed she—suddenly opened her eyes, which were dilated, and full of a strange brightness that was almost scorching. She unclasped her fleshless fingers, pressed her hands convulsively upon her bosom, and for a moment appeared to be struggling with an emotion which almost overcame her waning strength. But as Lady Madelaine approached the bed, and would have taken her hand, she waved her off imperiously; and, in a deep, harsh, labouring voice, she said bitterly;

“Not now, Madam, not here; this is my death-bed that you have come to look upon; and all

acting is over—approach, nevertheless: come and contemplate your work—come and gaze upon your victim. It was for this I bade you here—it was for this that, for the first time in my life, I have wished and watched for you.”

“Adela, my dear Adela—” expostulated the shuddering Lady O’Halloran.

“Let me speak;” persisted the dying girl; “Even you, my more than mother—if, indeed, the name of mother can imply tenderness, and patience, and affection, and self-abnegation—as I have read in books that it should do—even you I can no longer obey. Bear with me only for a few hours more, and I shall have done with this world.”

From the moment of my entrance into the death-room I had remained concealed from my sister by the curtains of her bed. I felt riveted to the earth, and had not courage to advance a step. I might, perhaps, after a time, have overcome this emotion; but the words to which I listened, and the unearthly tones in which they were uttered, rendered me powerless.

“You have been at least consistent, Madam:” resumed Adela, so soon as she had recovered from a violent spasm which appeared to rend her chest; “you have been no fickle spirit, no weak hater! I will say nothing of my childhood—but when that was past, did you not wring my

heart as never heart was wrung?—did you not thrust happiness upon me, and, when I almost clutched it, wrench it away with a withering smile, and bid me bear the trial as I might? you left me no alternative save an early death, or a life of bitterness and humiliation. I have made my choice—it is that which will the best suit your views and wishes—I am about to die: but, Madam, I die fearlessly, because I know that there is another world for you as well as for myself.”

As the panting girl paused to take breath, Lady Madelaine sank into a chair beside her with a deep groan.

“A world of justice,” pursued the failing voice; “where the Lazarus of the earth will have the sores of his spirit healed—where the great ones of this life will find their purple and fine linen rent away, and their hearts, with all their miserable, petty passions, laid bare—that world awaits even you, Madam,—you, the unloving wife, and the unnatural mother; you, and the tool of your selfishness; the weak and unstable being who has helped you on in your unholy work. May his falsehood be visited upon himself; and may she to whom——”

Thoroughly exhausted by the efforts which she had made, the power of the dying girl abandoned her at once, before she could render the remainder

of her sentence audible ; the few additional words which fell from her lips were disjointed and meaningless ; and, as she sank back heavily upon the pillow, a frightful spasm convulsed her features and distorted her limbs for a few seconds, during which I firmly imagined that she had ceased to exist ; but it was not so. When the terrible paroxysm had passed over, she once more opened her eyes ; and as they rested on the form of Lady Madelaine, who still retained her attitude of horror-stricken immobility, an expression of intense hatred passed over her features.

“ Let her leave me ; ” she gasped out, addressing Lady O’Halloran ; “ let her leave me—I would, at least, die in peace.”

The kind-hearted dowager approached my mother with an extended hand : “ Let us retire, Madam ; ” she whispered, “ your child has need of rest.”

Passively and mutely Lady Madelaine obeyed. She took the proffered hand as if to secure its support ; and, without once looking towards the death-bed, she left the room, in which nothing was audible save the low and laboured breathing of her last-born child. I followed with a tottering and uncertain step.

The near neighbourhood of a dying bed would at any time have shaken my nerves—while this

was not only that of my sister, but what a death-bed ! The peace of spirit, the tears of tenderness, the words of consolation—all had been absent. The spirit hovering between earth and Heaven, and which must, ere long, appear before the tribunal whose dread fiat involves an eternity, had elevated itself into a judge ; and I had seen the haughty nature of my mother quail and shrink before it. The words of Adela, which were vividly impressed upon my memory, filled me with a vague and undefined terror. My blood, frozen by the spectacle of decay and ruin which my first gaze into the death-room had revealed to me, and chilled more and more by the fearful tones of the invalid, suddenly, as I escaped from her presence, rushed to my heart, and circulated so rapidly that it appeared to suffocate me. That voice of bitter despair—of unyielding vengeance—was still in my ears ; that pale and unearthly face was still before my eyes. When I threw myself upon a seat in the room which had been hastily prepared for me, I felt as though the awful memories of the last hour would embitter all my future life. My horror was not lessened by the fact that I could not comprehend upon what the reproaches which my sister had addressed to Lady Madelaine were based ; while my astonishment at the patience with which they were sup-

ported by her imperious nature, was beyond my power to explain. I could only attribute it to the agitated powerlessness of surprise, or to that solemn respect which is always conceded to the dying.

So soon as I was able in some degree to control my feelings, I desired to be conducted to the apartment of Lady Madelaine. I found her seated, pale and tearless, in the attitude of a person more indignant than depressed. At the sound of my approach she turned towards me, and a deep flush spread over her brow, while her eyes flashed with animation. She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then averted her head, and appeared to hesitate, as though she had not altogether decided upon the line of conduct which she should pursue.

“This has been a bitter trial to you;” I said, as I placed myself beside her, and would have taken her hand, which was haughtily withdrawn; “I fear there is no longer any hope.”

“Hope! Of what?” she asked bitterly; “Do you mean a hope of the recovery of Miss Tilden? You are well advised to wish it. But I have no inclination to waste time upon your weak romance. Are you satisfied now that you have exposed me to the frightful scene through which I have just passed? That you have subjected me to insult

before a grovelling relative, a distasteful acquaintance, and my own child? A secret instinct forewarned me—I would have obeyed it. It was not your pleasure that I should be spared. You placed me under the necessity of condescending to this annoyance, or of becoming the mark for a thousand envenomed surmises. It is you whom I have to thank for all—you, and your odious precipitation. So long as I have life I will never forgive you this!”

I was so accustomed to the violence of my mother, that this strangely-timed outburst would scarcely have surprised me, had it taken another tone; but I was altogether unprepared to be made its object. Already weakened, both in mind and body, by the different emotions which had agitated me so painfully, all my remaining strength gave way before this tide of accusation; and I sank to my knees, crushed and quailing, as though I had indeed been guilty of some crime for which I needed the pardon of a parent. I sobbed out I know not what. I talked of the tie between us, of my dying sister, of my own bruised and blighted heart; I sought to appease my mother by promises, by caresses, and by submission; but I humbled myself in vain: for some time she maintained a resolute silence, while her heaving bosom, her burning cheek, and her flashing eye

gave evidence of the tempest which was raging within her. At length she rose, and flinging from her the hand in which I had clasped her own, she said haughtily; "Be silent and leave me—I wish to be alone."

There was no disputing a command uttered in such a tone; and, wondering as I did so at the violence of the impulse which could have compelled me to such an act of self-abasement, I rose from my knees, and quitted the room in silence. I heard Lady Madelaine ring her bell before I had crossed the antechamber; and as her woman obeyed the summons, she desired that Lord Otterford should be requested to join her in her apartment. It was not therefore solitude which she coveted.

It was some time before I could recover myself sufficiently for thought; but, when the power of reflection did at last return, I felt as though I were under some strange and unholy spell. All that had taken place within the last few hours was so extraordinary that I lost myself in the wildest and most irrational conjectures. Why did Adela accuse Lady Madelaine of her death, when the exile to which she had submitted herself was voluntary? What meant this death which she asserted was her own choice? This happiness of which she declared herself to have been treacher-

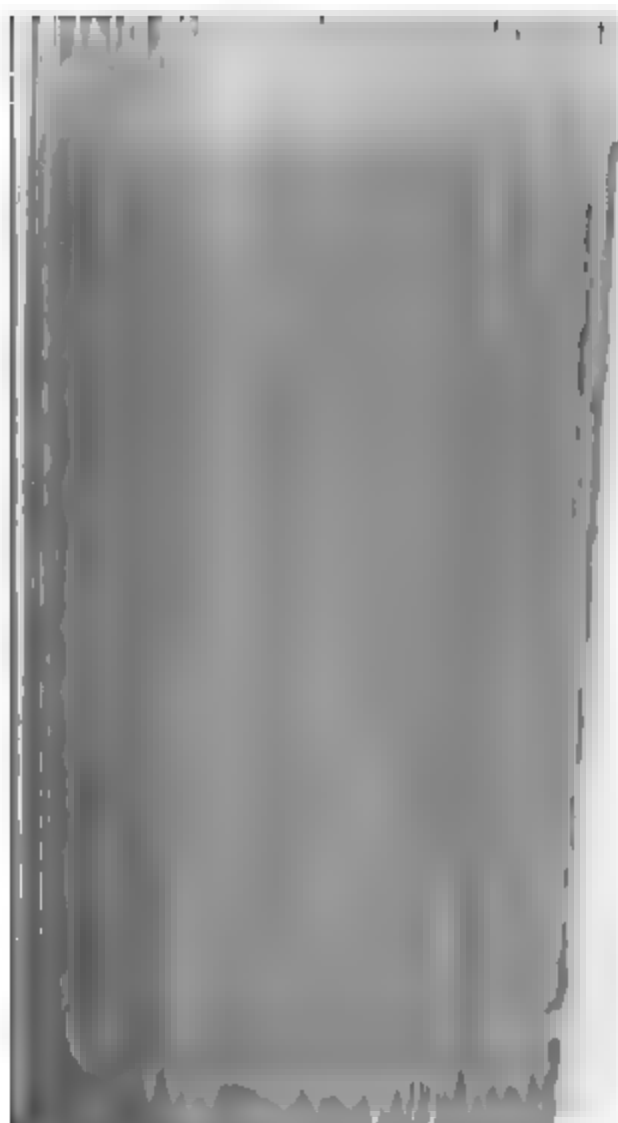
ously deprived? This perfidious and weak being by whom she had been abandoned? Who, finally, was that third person whom want of strength alone had prevented her from including in her anathema? Why had Lady Madelaine, even while she was loaded with reproaches, borne all in silence? Had terror and compunction stifled the voice of resentment? Was it natural that a child could have acquired so much power over her impetuous nature if her conscience did not whisper to her the justification of those reproaches?

These were the questions which rose rapidly to my mind; but which remained successively unanswered. I was in the midst of doubt; fearing alike to misunderstand what I saw, or to understand too much, when a slight sound caused me to start and look up. Lady O'Halloran stood before me; and I was about to fling myself upon her bosom, when I was struck by the extraordinary expression of her face.

The truth flashed upon me instantly. "All is then over?" I murmured, while a cold shudder ran through my veins.

"Yes! all is over. Her sufferings are at an end."

"Alas! I exclaimed, as I sank back powerless upon my seat; "dare we indeed hope so? I am still quailing under the impression of her last mysterious words.—Did you, dearest Lady O'Halloran, did you—see her die?"



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contained information on points of interest with which it was necessary you should be acquainted immediately that she had ceased to exist. I respected both her secret and yours, and asked no question."

I could thank her only with my tears.

"Do not weep for her, Eveleen, weep for yourself;" said Lady O'Halloran compassionately. "It is now too late to grieve over her trials, for they are ended. Yours, my child, I fear, are but beginning. May she so resolutely have expended her little remaining strength, in order to comfort you with a sister's love, and a sister's counsel. That last token of her remembrance occupied many, many of her latest hours of comparative ease and health. She appeared to forget alike her languor and her sufferings while she was engaged upon it. It was in vain that her physician, Lady Flora, and myself, warned her of the probable effect of such continual exertion; her constant reply to all our expostulations, was an assurance that she should live to complete her task, and that she desired no more."

"Poor Adela!" I murmured, wringing my hands in remorse of spirit.

"Poor Adela!" echoed my companion; "she is now united to the only parent who loved her."

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delay of a day may be fatal to her wishes. I will be ready at daybreak."

"Farewell then, my dear Eveleen; I have already taken leave of your mother, and am unequal to another interview, even with yourself. Farewell; and should you ever want a friend, remember me."

She extended her arms, and I threw myself into them. I could not utter a syllable; but she understood my emotion; and after having pressed her lips affectionately to my forehead, she replaced me gently in my chair, rung for Joséphine, and left the room.

CHAPTER VII.

My journey back to town was a wretched one. Prostrated by the emotions I had so recently experienced, and haunted by the memory of the fearful death-bed from which I had only just escaped, I could not have been condemned to a more trying companionship than that of Lady Madelaine. By turns conciliating and threatening, at intervals she fulminated against me the most bitter reproaches for the trial to which she had been subjected by my hasty presumption; and at others she reminded me that Adela had never been either a daughter or a sister to herself and me, and hinted at the immense increase of fortune which necessarily accrued to me through her death. The last argument was powerless. Had I not already experienced the insufficiency of wealth to secure happiness?

I thought incessantly of my hidden packet. It was evident that my mother knew nothing of this

bequest; for I learnt from Joséphine, that immediately after the death of Adela, she had demanded her keys and her writing-desk, and had read and destroyed all the papers that it contained. I was doubly anxious, therefore, to ascertain the contents of that which I possessed; and exhausted alike by the inconsistent humour of Lady Madeleine, my own feelings, and the thirst for opportunity to learn the last wishes and sentiments of my sister, I fancied every minute an hour, until we at length arrived in London.

To my great relief my mother suggested that I should leave her in Grosvenor Square, and at once proceed to my own house, alleging, as her reason, the necessity of forthwith making arrangements for our mourning, and adopting some resolution regarding our future movements, until the period when we could again appear with propriety in public. She said something, also, of the inconvenience of a death in the family just in the height of the season; but as I did not perfectly hear the remark, and was moreover anxious not to enlighten myself further upon the subject, I made no comment upon her words, querulously as they were uttered.

On entering my home I was by no means surprised to learn that Sir James was absent; but I was not the less satisfied with the assurance. I hastened at once to my dressing-room, threw off

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was luxurious, costly, fresh, and cheerful ; and, at length, I shook off the feeling of mental and physical weakness to which I had yielded, and withdrew the papers from their envelope. I must transcribe them as they lay before me. Any attempt at a description of their contents would be still more painful even now, though long and weary years have elapsed since they were put into my hands, than to follow them word by word, and line by line, with a faithful pen.

I broke the seal with quivering fingers. I had argued myself into a state of doubtful courage : I had tried to believe that they would enable me to dwell with greater tenderness upon the memory of my sister, more than ever darkened by that last fatal scene to which I had been a trembling witness ; but, as I felt the wax give way beneath my touch, this trust abandoned me.

It is through the most trifling agencies that deep sorrow generally enters into the heart of a woman ; from the most inconsequent springs that the full consciousness of her unhappiness is filtrated into her entire being. An indistinct whisper—a word overheard by chance—a gloom upon the countenance of a friend whose usual greeting is a smile—all these become prophecies by an intuitive faculty, incomprehensible even to herself, and which is called into existence on the

eve of a misfortune destined to give its colour to her future fate; and she murmurs to herself, "I am about to be wretched," with the same innate conviction as that of the wild bird, to which the trembling of the foliage, and the wail of the wind as it sweeps over the high grass, and along the surface of the water, reveals the approach of the yet unseen storm.

No wonder then, if trifles such as these can obtrude their warning, that as I unfolded the papers which were to reveal to me alike the present and the past, and to make the future a blank, no wonder that I trembled.

"I am standing upon the brink of that grave in which my youth and my sorrows will soon be alike buried; but not, as I have reason to believe, alike forgotten. You intruded your confidence on me, Eveleen, to the ruin of all the happiness which this earth might yet have yielded as a requital for the trials of my youth. I am now about to pay the debt. I also will reveal the secret of my life to you; and the result will in your case be without doubt the same; if, indeed, the world to which you have vowed yourself has not quite done its work."

My agitation increased with every sentence. I could scarcely breathe from terror! What was I about to learn? What meant this ominous threat

to reveal a secret which was to plunge me into misery? I swept back the hair from my forehead. The moisture which had risen to my eyes had disappeared. I was fevered by a terrible anticipation. Again I fastened my eyes upon the writing. It was firm and flowing—not a pulse of the writer had quivered. I proceeded.—

“Fear and hatred were the first feelings which were taught to expand in my young heart. When I became old enough to comprehend my position, I found myself an alien from my family—branded like Cain—but, unlike him, guiltless of the crime, while suffering its penalty. I learnt to pronounce the name of my mother only to shrink before the idea that it called up—of my sister; only to quail before a humiliating and bitter comparison. The victim of injustice and disregard, I soon began to look into my own heart, and to pay back, in distrust and indignation, the wrongs of which I was keenly susceptible.

“The frivolous, but dazzling advantages which you had received from the education bestowed upon you; your luxury, your indulgence, and the insolent vanity which was their fruit, contrasted with my own privations, continued to do their slow but certain work; and when we met at Rooksley for the first time, I know not which was

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tones, of which you can neither estimate the force, nor comprehend the value? But these are questions beyond my own reach, and I will not look to you for a reply. In my delusion, I began to love, because I pitied you; but the arrogant triumph of your farewell, when you were summoned from our common exile to appear once more beside Lady Madelaine in the gay world for which you panted, soon destroyed the charm.

“Do you remember that in expatiating upon your love for Devereux, you scouted with contempt the suggestion which I made, that your mother wished to make you the wife of another—of one who—in short, of Sir James Dornton. Why should I shrink from naming a man whom, from my inmost soul, I despise beyond all else on earth? Do you remember with what fierce and feverish indignation you repelled the idea? Should you, indeed, have ceased to do so, call back your thoughts—the time is still too recent to require a great effort of memory.

“On my part, your astonished look was not unobserved, when Lady Flora and myself returned the greeting of Sir James on his visit to Rooksley during Lady Madelaine’s widowhood, as that of one to whom we were not altogether strangers. The cause was simple: he was grouse-shooting in Scotland, when Lady Madelaine saw fit to sum-

mon me at last to what should have been the home of my infancy ; and, at her request, he took charge of us to London ; but I was at that period so mere a girl, and, moreover, so pre-occupied by the approaching change in my position, that I should have forgotten his existence, had not your passionate invectives taught me to believe that you did him less than justice. Yes, Lady Dorn-ton, you it was who first awoke in my heart that feeling of interest in his fate, which those who have themselves suffered from injustice, naturally extend to their fellow victims.

“ I had lived a life of utter isolation. My studies, unlike your own, had been grave and serious. Your experience, real and acquired, startled and enlightened me. I began to understand that I also might, at some future time, find beyond the circle of my own family, that tenderness which had been denied to me within it. I began to listen with more eagerness, and to reflect with more precision ; and after a while I combined with my own visions the image of a man who like myself was despised, and probably misjudged. Do not imagine, however, that I even tried to fancy that I loved him : my feelings, unlike your own, were not the sport of impulse and romance : to me he was only a reposing point for my unloved and solitary spirit : an

object from which I did not shrink because it had never causelessly and wantonly repelled me. I am not asking for your sympathy: to me even at that moment it would have been valueless: judge, therefore, what it must be now.

“ You left Rooksley, and I wept when I lost sight of you—but it was not your departure that I mourned: it was this new wrong done to myself. You had, however, left your influence behind. You had opened up a new world to my solitary musings, and made me feel that solitude tenfold more bitter. I longed to annihilate time, and to attain the age when I also should be introduced into the world: not to pamper myself with its vanities, not to pollute myself with its deceit, not to degrade myself by its falsehood, but simply and solely to commence my search after that one only being who was to be to me—to the poor unloved and deserted Adela,—at once a fond protector and a tender friend. Surely I did not ask too much of fate! I was willing to receive this boon as a compensation for all else on earth. Others have so many to love them—I only asked for one,—and that one——but all this is worse than idle: there is another feeling in the human breast fiercer and quite as firm as love. I shall not have died before I learnt it.

“ You are, perhaps, not aware that ere you had

been long in town our mother made a hurried journey to Rooksley : the pretext was some forgotten papers, too precious to be entrusted to indifferent hands. Certain it is that she was accompanied by Sir James Dornton. It was in the park when they arrived, and to my surprise was summoned to receive them. This was an unexpected, and would have been an equally unwelcome attention on the part of Lady Madelaine, who was not apt so promptly to remember my existence, had I not been also informed who was her companion. Curiosity at once overcame every other feeling. I should, at least, have an opportunity of judging by my own observations in how far he merited the disdain and dislike with which you had overwhelmed him, and I hastened to return to the house.

“ It is probable that my hurried walk had given a glow to my complexion, for—I remember it well, as it was the first and only time that it occurred — Lady Madelaine herself glanced at me with complacency, and even deigned to utter a few words of approbation at my altered appearance, as Sir James approached to greet me. How different did he appear from the picture that you had sketched ! He looked steadily, almost searchingly upon me, with a smile before which my eyes fell, while I felt the rushing blood crimson

my cheeks and forehead. His voice was low and soft as he addressed me ; and whenever I subsequently glanced towards him, I still met the almost ardent gaze which thrilled to my very heart. I listened eagerly to his conversation with my mother, in which he betrayed a constant anxiety to include me, but I was at that moment less than ever capable of exertion. Nevertheless I felt that, for the first time in my life, I was not altogether overlooked. On one occasion, when Lady Madelaine was engrossed for a few instants by her sister, Sir James addressed himself to me, and exerted all his powers, and they are great—what is there on earth more brilliant than the scaled coat of the serpent whose bite is poison ?—all his graceful eloquence, to convince me that, in his eyes at least, I was worthy of regard and courtesy : and I welcomed the soothing effort as the parched wilderness welcomes the refreshing dew of heaven.

“ The papers, as Lady Madelaine asserted, were found ; and once more Rooksley was restored to its monotony ; but its gloom was gone. As I saw them drive from the door, all had become more bright about me : I was a new being. Something whispered me that Sir James was not gone for ever : that the papers had been an imaginary want ; and that I was the actual object of this

visit. But how? the blood leapt to my heart: I remembered with an indescribable thrill of delight that my mother had reminded me that in another week I should be sixteen years of age, and that it was time for me to be more careful of my appearance. I was full of a mysterious joy. I should not, probably, so readily have combined circumstances apparently so trifling: and decidedly I should never have been so powerfully affected by what were, after all, the mere courtesies of a man of fashion and my mother's friend, had not your superior knowledge taught me where and how to form these combinations. As it was, however, the new sentiment by which I was inspired exalted me in my own eyes. I was more than ever convinced of the possibility that I should one day be loved as others were; and to the curiosity which I had felt regarding Sir James, there succeeded the gratitude due to the man who had first afforded me a brighter glimpse of the cheering and sustaining prospect.

A week passed away: a week of bright and happy dreams; when once more Sir James Dornton arrived at Rooksley. I was agitated with joy, but that joy was unmixed with surprise. I had had, from the hour of his departure, an intuitive conviction of his prompt return. He also had his pretext. He came at the request of my mother,

but he did not explain the cause of her sudden solicitude, nor did I waste one word on the inquiry. In her absence I was less constrained : for a few hours I was his hostess, and I exerted myself to do the honours worthily. After dinner he proposed a saunter through the grounds.

“Lady Flora, according to her daily habit, was already half asleep in her chair, and declined to accompany us ; the eyes of Sir James flashed with delight ; and in five minutes we were buried in the shrubberies.

“I do not spare you one detail, Eveleen. You are proud of your destiny. Poor tool of another’s will ! Married to a man who never loved you, at the bidding of a mother who consulted only her own interest in the disposal of your hand.”

“What had I to fear ? Lady Flora slept : and for her, during the next few hours, time was consequently annihilated, while I leant upon the arm of the first being who had given me a value in my own eyes. Is it then marvellous that an hour had not elapsed since we left the house, ere I ascertained that Lady Madelaine knew nothing of this visit ? or wonderful that when I expressed my fear of her displeasure, he should find it an easy task to allay that fear ? Let those who seek to blame me appreciate my position.

“Before we parted I felt that I was loved. What

woman can be deceived when the feeling is not feigned? I did not wish to receive an assurance that it was so, but rather thanked in my heart the delicacy which left the decisive words as yet unuttered. Occasionally, as we conversed, my companion looked earnestly at me, and listened with an eagerness to which all flattery would have been inadequate. By a single word, a single look, he encouraged me to continue speaking; and I was proudly conscious that every hour I had risen in his esteem. The brilliant man of the world hung upon the fresh and unfettered fancies, upon the grave feelings of a mere girl, the pupil of the mountains and of their sublime and soul-strengthening silence. Yes! he may have sold his soul, bartered his honour, and sullied his self-esteem by becoming the husband of another; but I go to my grave with the consolatory conviction that from that eventful evening he has loved me only!

“ Again, and again he came, and ere long I was his betrothed wife. I knew nothing of the after-machinations of Lady Madelaine. He confided to me simply that she had consented to our marriage, but at her own good time; and that, in the interval, we were only to meet in her presence. This declaration alarmed me, for I had everything

to dread from the involuntary indiscretion of Lady Flora, who believed his visits to be, not only sanctioned, but even suggested by her sister, and who had never entertained the slightest suspicion of our mutual attachment.

“ Sir James reluctantly acceded to the justice of my fears ; and his declared visits to Rooksley gradually declined, and at length were entirely suspended. I saw him still, however, at frequent intervals ; and when he failed to present himself at our appointed rendezvous, he was replaced by his letters. He was to be my husband ! I was content with this assurance ; the when, never occupied my thoughts. My happiness was so immense that it afforded space neither for fear nor hope. I lived in the present. Satisfied of the truth of his affection, I had acknowledged mine with the usual frankness of my nature. Ignorant of the usages of the world on such occasions, and still more so of the perfidy by which that happy ignorance might be repaid, I laid my whole heart before him, and did not hesitate to let him know that henceforward my existence depended utterly upon himself. Had I acted otherwise I should have been self-despised for my own vain and empty heartlessness.

“ Here, on my death-bed, when my extended

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I lived !'

CHAPTER VIII.

I laid the manuscript upon the table : my tears had blinded me. Poor Adela ! I forgave all her invectives against myself, bitter as they were—I even forgot for a time the fearful nature of my own position—I only felt that I pitied her, and would have called her for an instant from her grave to tell her that she was revenged—for that in my turn I did not love this man. After a time I resumed my painful task.—

“ Eveleen ! had you really been capable of the attachment for which you proudly claimed belief—before you forfeited it for ever—you would understand my feelings when the visits of Sir James suddenly ceased, and his letters became changed. You, however, would not, perhaps, have perceived that change ; or had you chanced to do so, might probably have deemed it matter of self-gratulation, for they were, if not as lengthy as ever, tenfold more full of protestations and endearing epithets.

But I had studied him closely, and was not to be so deceived.

“The ore of true passion was no longer there, and the base counterfeit of eloquent adulation was substituted in its place. All was constraint and effort. He wrote like a man above whose head was suspended the sword of a modern Damocles—who quailed before some anticipated danger. My pride revolted at the conviction: but alas! that wholesome pride was subdued beneath a more powerful feeling. I have told you—not now, nor here—but long, long ago, when you first taught me to reason on such subjects; I told you then that I could not love as you did, with one hand clasped in that of my husband, and the other extended to beckon to the world to come between us—but wholly and exclusively. Unlike yours, my practice does not gainsay my precepts; and this man was to be my husband—could I then see without agony even one vapour of doubt arise to separate us? No—no—the stake for which I played was not merely my happiness, it was my life, and I could not afford to lose it lightly.

“I answered his letter by one line; ‘Come,’ I said, ‘if you would ever again see me in this world,’ and then I drew close the curtains to shut out the sunshine, that, after smiling on my

happiness, now, with the same hot glare, seemed to mock my anguish; and in the sudden twilight of my darkened chamber, I sat down to reflect upon the misery which I felt was about to come upon me.

“I once read of a man subjected by an awful tribunal to torture. He was alone, in utter darkness, bound hand and foot upon a couch furnished with warm and soft coverings, and on his unprotected head fell at measured intervals a drop of ice-cold water. It did not vary in its descent a single instant; the failure of one drop, even by a second, would have been a relief which he might have repaid by a sob of prayer; but there was no intermission, none! He knew it, for he counted each by the pulsations of his heart—— I might have pitied even him during that fearful night. In my position you would have wept yourself to sleep like a tired child; but I had no tears for the fate that I foresaw. There was a morrow to that night, and then came three more weary days; and my stubborn heart kept its watch steadily, for I had calculated the time which must elapse ere he could obey my summons; but the last few hours were almost too much for my reason. I read and re-read the fatal letter, until the lines danced before my eyes, and I looked through a cloud of flickering atoms, as

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of anguish, which I have never since forgotten, I calmly repeated my question.

“ ‘ Adela, you torture me !’ he exclaimed vehemently ; ‘ do you, can you doubt my affection ?’

“ ‘ I will not ; I dare not ;’ was my reply ; ‘ but it must be assured beyond all possibility of suspicion. Another week like the last would destroy me, body and mind. I must hear from the lips, or read in the writing of Lady Madelaine herself that I am to be your wife. I must know that my fate is fixed beyond the power of caprice or tyranny. With less than this I can no longer rest satisfied. Let her name her own time ; I shall have the certainty of future happiness to abridge the interval. Let me even be denied all personal communication with you until that time arrives, and I will submit ; but I cannot remain a prey to uncertainty and suspense. I cannot any longer subject myself to be the mere tool of another’s pleasure.’

“ Then it was, that Sir James, overcome by the steady resolution of my words and manner, avowed to me that he had reason to apprehend a change in the projects of Lady Madelaine. The admission only made me the more steadily adhere to my purpose.

“ ‘ Until her will is known, should such, indeed, be the case, we must not meet again ;’ I

replied, with an appearance of calm which belied the real agitation that I felt: 'of your own truth I can entertain no doubt. I felt at once from whence the blow must come. See Lady Madeleine, remind her of her voluntary pledge; tell her that you exact its performance, and all will yet be well?'

" 'You shall be satisfied,' he said at length, in an accent which betrayed more fear than hope. 'I will do as you require: but should I meet with a refusal, all may be lost through this precipitation.'

" 'A refusal!' was my rejoinder, 'does she not call you her friend? Is not your own happiness involved in the question?'

" 'Adela!' he exclaimed reproachfully, 'do you doubt it?'

" 'Again I say no—but why this fear, for which you have hitherto chidden me? Has my mother displayed any new proofs of her aversion? Does she indeed hate me to an excess which will induce her to sacrifice your happiness in order to destroy mine?'

" 'No—I am bound to declare the contrary; and yet——'

" 'Enough;' I said hurriedly; 'we can be ultimately separated only by your own agency; for myself, I am pledged to you for ever—death alone can dissolve the vows that I have uttered. I am

aware that Lady Madelaine can not only oppose, but also retard our union : be it so : in five years I shall be my own mistress, and may defy her authority. The time is long, I admit ;' I added, as Dornton made an impatient gesture ; ' but as you love me——'

" ' Better than my life,' he interrupted eagerly ; ' but if you loved as I do, you could not talk thus coolly of a delay which appears to me eternal.'

" ' You misjudge me : hear me then : make me your wife, and carry me abroad—anywhere, the world is wide enough, and all countries will be to me alike if you are beside me. When I am of age we will return to England ; and, in the possession of our proper rank, revenge ourselves upon the past.'

" A gloom like that of midnight spread over the face of Dornton. Fool that I was not to comprehend how terrible a secret lay below that darkness ! Secure in his affection, I had yet to learn that the ruined gamester and the debt-covered man of fashion must sell himself for gold when it was tendered to his grasp. What had he to do with affection or with fidelity ? He had tasted of the world's stream ; and he was eager to bid the waters of Marah flow over the golden sands of Pactolus. I, too, tendered him wealth—but when ? I knew nothing of all this when I urged

him to a step he had not the means to take ; and we parted, after he had pledged himself to an explanation with Lady Madelaine, of which he was himself to bring me the result.

“ Four more weary days and nights of impatient anguish intervened, before the hour at which he could again arrive at Rooksley. I was unable to take even physical repose : the fate of my whole existence was about to be decided, and I was powerless to turn the balance. On the morning of the fifth day I was at our trysting place at an early hour ; nor did I long await the information which I went to seek. A stranger met me, and with a respectful salutation, tendered a letter upon whose superscription I instantly recognised the well-known characters of Dornton. I had no sooner taken it from his hand, than with a second silent bow, he turned and walked hastily away.

“ I stood motionless for a moment with the letter in my hand.—Did something whisper to you, Lady Dornton, as you looked on this packet that it would decide your destiny in this life ? Did your blood curdle, your hand quiver, and your eye grow dim ? It may be so : I had already undergone the same agony which I have bequeathed to you. Suddenly a new impulse urged me to fly the spot, and to learn ALL—and I plunged into the thickest of the wood, and

throwing myself down upon the earth, I resolutely tore asunder the folds of the letter which had been so mysteriously transmitted to me. I read it from one end to the other without a pause. Read it in your turn. It is a production of the man to whom you have given your hand, and can scarcely fail to excite your interest—

“‘ I am about, my beloved Adela, to plunge a dagger into your heart—fearful necessity to a man by whom you are adored ! I dare not, however, incur the culpability of leaving you for one moment in ignorance of the fatal truth, beneath which my own prospects of domestic happiness are for ever crushed. All is over. We must renounce every hope of being united in this world. Neither prayers nor tears will soften the unbending will of your mother ; nor is there even a chance that time might operate a change. I have thought much of your self-abnegating and generous proposal ; but alas ! you do not guess, novice as you are in the world’s ways, beneath how frightful a load of suspicion and contempt I should bury myself, were I selfish enough to profit by it. I should be accused of taking an unmanly advantage of your youth and inexperience ; and the pure effect of a passionate attachment would be attributed to a sordid interest of which you alone would know me to be

incapable. I could not live under this stigma, even with you to comfort and console me; and I could never again raise my head proudly among my fellow-men. These are fearful anticipations, Adela: alike for you and for myself: too fearful to be realised. Nor would you, pure and perfect as you are, escape the reverberation of the thunder. Your reputation would be sullied; your position ruined; and this shall never be for my sake. Beloved of my heart! your very virtues would thus become a scourge. Weep then for yourself, and weep for me; but bend in pity to us both before the inexorable destiny which parts us.'

"Eveleen—had a traveller passed near the woods of Rooksley at the moment of sunshine and silence in which my burning eye-balls fastened upon the signature of this heartless letter, he would have dreamed that happy and light hearts were wandering beneath their shadows; for I was myself startled by the peal of ringing laughter which escaped from between my parched and quivering lips. Yes, Lady Dorn-ton, yes—the fiends laugh—they have a mad mirth of their own—a frantic merriment that must have voice, or it would choke the reveller. I knew it then! Despair made me resolute; I answered this withering letter; briefly but urgently; I insisted that

he should himself come to Rooksley, and give me all the details of his interview with Lady Madelaine. He resisted resolutely; again he wrote: he urged that it would destroy his reason were he to see me again only to lose me a second time. Passion and anguish breathed in every line; I laid the letters side by side before me, and I could not reconcile their tone. It was evident that another revolution had taken place in the feelings, if not in the intentions of Dornton, and I was resolved to solve the mystery.

“Once more I summoned him, upon his honour as a true man, to obey my bidding; and after the delay of another week he re-appeared. He told me that he came from Woodville; that you had barely escaped from death; and that Lady Madelaine and her husband had urged him to continue their guest during your convalescence—and still, poor cheated fool! I suspected nothing. I meant to tell you all that passed after his arrival, but I cannot—my strength is weaker than my purpose. Enough that day after day he lingered near me, evidently bowed down by the weight of some mighty sorrow which he would not reveal. As for myself, despair had made me frantic, and this fatal mystery overthrew my poor remains of composure. The excitement of the false position in which I stood, the evident

wretchedness of the man I loved, and the tenacity with which he refused all explanation of a secret whose existence he did not attempt to gainsay, fevered my brain, and as we were about to part, I fell lifeless into his arms.

“My hour of bitter triumph was come. Regardless of consequences he bore me to the house, to the consternation of the bewildered Lady Flora, and the marvel of our slender household; and once there, refused to quit me for an instant. When I recovered power to articulate, his name rose instinctively to my lips, and it was his own voice which answered the appeal. A second syncope, succeeded by delirium, soon informed Lady Flora of our secret, and thenceforward she allowed no one to approach me save herself and the physician. At times she summoned Sir James, that he might strive to recal my scattered faculties; and there were moments in which he partially succeeded. My first care on a return of reason, was to obtain from him a solemn pledge that he would not abandon me until I was convalescent. He started in alarm as I demanded this, and would have urged a thousand pleas against it; but I denounced him as my murderer, if he left me thus to die of the despair which was his own work; and at length he promised everything.

“Reckless of the future, careless of the past,

weak in body, but calm in spirit, I was happy. Happy, amid my physical suffering, for he was constantly beside me; happy in the belief that even yet all was not lost; while Lady Flora looked on, satisfied by my assurance that I must become the wife of Dornton, or perish.

“Little did I guess, Eveleen, that the tender nurse who had so lately left your sick bed to take up his post at mine, had become my brother.—But I cannot even now dwell upon that time, for once more I feel my brain burn, and my sinking frame quiver beneath the fierce pulsations of a heart too big for its weak and narrow prison-house. Your letter awoke me from my trance—Your letter, in which you announced your marriage and your isolation; and asked me—ME! to become your companion. I was alone with Lady Flora when I received it; and I read it to the end. I can tell you nothing more than that I was suddenly startled by the vehement grief of my poor aunt; and that when I strove to open my eyes, and to inquire into its cause, I felt as though I were crushed down upon my bed by a hand of iron. Slowly, and by imperceptible degrees reason came back upon me; and, with it, memory; and then I struggled fiercely with my agony; and for a time I conquered. I demanded the letter, and it was put into my hands.

Once more I read it resolutely to the end ; and then I bade them summon Sir James. He was gone. I had lain twelve hours in my frightful swoon, and the coward had escaped the curse I prepared for him. They would have disobeyed me when I asked for writing materials ; but I was too well aware that my factitious strength was nearly spent, to listen to their expostulations, and I was at length obeyed. I answered your letter ; I uttered no reproach ; I gave vent to no invective ; I felt that I should not long survive the struggle ; and I resolved to leave you for awhile in ignorance, and to bequeath the truth as my best vengeance, when remorse would be too late.

“ I have no more to tell—no comment to make—no word of bitterness to utter. I leave you to your own thoughts—Weak, unstable, and irresolute, you had already forfeited all claim to happiness—Should you still cling to one hope, be wise enough to fasten it upon the grave.

Farewell.”

CHAPTER IX.

I suffered the papers to fall from my hand. I had read even to the last line; hurriedly, eagerly, gaspingly; and now I knew all. I could think—I could not weep—I had no pity either for my dead sister, or for myself—no hate for Dornton—no feeling of either the present or the past. All was dead within me. My eyes were open, but I did not distinguish an object; my apartment looked upon a great thoroughfare, but I did not hear a sound. I was, for the moment, annihilated.

Gradually, however, and painfully I awoke from this stupor. My brain whirled; my heart laboured with thick sobs; those dry and withering sobs which rend their way, with each its separate pang. I clenched my hands until the blood started beneath my nails; I writhed like one convulsed; and still the frightful truth glared full upon me—I had been the unconscious murderer of my sister!

And for what? And whom? And then uprose within me the boiling hatred which my long lethargy had for a time suppressed. I had to revenge not only Adela, but myself also. How I envied her the grave into which she had gone down! How I loathed myself that I was still condemned to live and suffer! All was dark and hopeless about me. What had I now to ask of fate!

Such was my state of mind when the door of my dressing-room suddenly opened, and my husband stood before me. As my eye fell on his advancing figure, I uttered a wild scream, and covered my face with my spread hands.

"What means this, Eveleen?" he asked in a troubled voice, as he stopped before me: "how am I to interpret this reception?"

I strove to speak, but I could not. My emotion rendered me unable to articulate.

"This is worse than childish, Lady Dornton;" he continued more firmly; "I have already seen your mother, and I know all. Yet surely, the death of your sister——"

"Name her not!" I exclaimed, as I started vehemently to my feet, animated by a new feeling; "name her not, lest the words wither the lips which utter them. Name her not to me—to me! at once her victim and her executioner."

Dornton was evidently agitated, but he strove to suppress his emotion.

“Has your grief indeed deranged your faculties?” he asked struggling to smile.

For all answer, I pointed to the papers, which still lay where they had fallen. He stooped, and gathered them together; but as he did so, his hand trembled.

“Do you recognise the writing?” I asked bitterly, as I again sank into my seat; “it is the legacy, Sir James Dornton, which the dead Adela has bequeathed to me—and you.”

While I was speaking, he had run his eye rapidly over the opening lines. “I see it all,” he said; “I might have expected this. She knew the weakness of your nature, and she has revenged her wrongs upon you.”

“Dare you talk thus to me!” I cried, irritated even amid my anguish: “You, who have destroyed us both!”

“You use strong language, Lady Dornton;” he said, striving to assume an accent of indignation; “and such as you are unable to justify. You now know what it had been better for your peace to have concealed from you for ever. The evil is, however, beyond remedy: and I owe it to myself to place the matter in its proper light.”

His self-possession startled me; but the damning

evidence of his dishonor was before my eyes, and I retorted angrily; "The 'matter' will admit no light but one. I do not now speak of myself—I have time for my own wrongs—I address you as the deceiver of my sister."

"And upon what grounds do you accuse me of deception?"

"Did you not use every method to induce her to believe that you loved her?"

"I do not deny it; the fact was so."

"You did love her! You admit it, and yet you abandoned her!"

"I was the slave of circumstances."

"Did you not persuade her that she was to become your wife?"

"I did, in the firm belief that such would be the case."

I pressed my hand upon my burning forehead. I was bewildered.

"I used, as you have stated, every effort to gain the affections of your sister;" he continued hurriedly: "I had reason to believe that she was to share my fortunes; her peculiarity of character attracted me, and the romance of a young, fresh heart, lent itself willingly to the endeavours which I made to owe her hand to her own affections, no less than to the will of those who had power over her actions. Rest assured that the tragical termi-

nation of our attachment has proved as bitter to me as to herself, although where I have only striven, she has sunk."

"And why," I interposed; "why, if you really loved her, did you not withstand all opposition? Why destroy us both only to thwart your inclination?"

"I had no alternative," was his reply.

I shook my head contemptuously.

"You doubt my assertion; and yet I could readily prove its truth; but the explanation would involve details which might not flatter your self-love; and I would rather you should credit my declaration without further proof."

"Fear nothing, Sir;" I said haughtily; "my self-love is beyond your reach. What can you admit which will touch it more nearly than the words that you have already uttered. Even the vanity, to which you make allusion, has not deprived me of the power to understand that I am indebted for your hand to the fortune with which destiny had cursed me."

"Be it as you will;" was his unmoved reply. "It then only remains for me to justify myself."

I bowed in silence.

"Reckless as you are;" he resumed after the pause of a moment; "you have nevertheless been long enough my wife to understand that at

the period of our marriage my pecuniary resources were exhausted. I was therefore under the necessity of forming an alliance which would enable me to retain my accustomed position in society. I looked round me; and from the moment in which I became intimately acquainted with your family, I cast my eyes upon yourself. You were very young, but I had gained the confidence and friendship of your mother, and I knew that she was all-powerful. I therefore resolved to retrench sufficiently to enable me to wait for a few years, and I meanwhile continued to pay my court assiduously to Lady Madelaine. I see your lip curl; but your contempt is misplaced. Do not men frequently toil during a life-time, suffer privation and contumely, and even barter their good name for gold, of which they subsequently make a weak and unworthy use, when their necessities are not more imperative than my own? And with what have you to reproach me since our marriage?"

"Proceed, Sir;" I said coldly; "for the tale promises to be a long one."

"The death of your father altered all my projects. It is true that if Lady Madelaine had distinguished me by her regard, she had been no less condescending to Lord Otterford; while neither the one nor the other could boast of one

unguarded word or action by which to assume a claim upon her preference—you have yet much, Lady Dornton, to study in your mother; and much from which, as a woman of the world, you might derive no small advantage.”

“You are completing my education, Sir James.” I said bitterly.

He bowed with a sarcastic smile; turned his chair more fully upon me, and proceeded.

“The death of your father left your mother free: she was still in the full lustre of her beauty and of her fashion, and desirable in every point of view. Her fortune, although indeed, less considerable than your own, was tangible, and within my reach from the moment in which she became my wife; and this circumstance was far from indifferent to me, as every year rendered my position more difficult.

“You have doubtlessly not forgotten my appearance at Rooksley during your mother’s widowhood. I went there to offer her my hand, and she was flattered by my declaration. She admitted this fact frankly; but I soon perceived the reason of my failure, for of that she convinced me at once. She strove to keep her secret, but I was playing a desperate game, and I at once declared my conviction of her attachment to Lord Otterford. At that period Otterford had

not declared himself, and the pride of Lady Madelaine took alarm.

“ ‘ I am neither young enough, nor wealthy enough for you, Sir James ;’ she said; ‘ Eveleen is the wife best suited alike to your habits and your tastes. Like you she promises to be a world-worshipper ; and her beauty and fortune will enable you to realize all the dreams of your ambition. You know that my authority over her is unlimited—you are no stranger to her absurd and childish fancy for young Devereux : you are, in short, an old and tried friend of the family, and under your protection her fate would be assured. I have long desired an opportunity of suggesting this marriage to you, and I gladly embrace that which your declared preference for myself has afforded to me. Does my proposal meet your views ?’

“ I was at a loss how to reply. Quite aware that I was as much indebted to the prudent egotism of Lady Madelaine on this occasion, as to her regard, I made difficulties, all of which flattered her vanity, and increased her friendship; but at length I yielded. After a long and animated conversation my destiny was decided : but I was not altogether satisfied. It is true that, as though she could have penetrated into the design which I had formed several years previously, she

voluntarily offered me your own hand; still I should have preferred a more certain and a more immediate boon, and I was mortified that she should sacrifice me to a mere animal like Otterford, whose only charm lay in a handsome face, and a certain tact in flattering the weaknesses and follies of her character. I knew that, once her husband, he must necessarily degenerate into a domestic automaton : he was formed for no other purpose, and my prophecy has been realized."

I was lost in astonishment at the audacity with which Dornton thus crowned himself with his vices, and exacted worship for them; but I struggled resolutely against my indignation, and commanded myself sufficiently to listen with at least an appearance of composure.

"She had no sooner herself become a wife:" pursued Dornton undauntedly; "than I reminded her of her promise, and she at once pledged herself to fulfil it, although she would appoint no given period. The motives which she alleged for this delay were specious: I was not, however, at a loss to divine her real ones: she was too recently a bride to tolerate so unequal a rivalry; and, as I felt how useless all argument must prove against such a conviction, I submitted in silence. Otterford was less punctilious; from the period of their marriage he never ceased to represent to

your mother the incongruity and danger of thus shutting you out from a world so well aware of your existence, and so ready to draw false deductions from your extraordinary seclusion; and she at length yielded reluctantly to his entreaties.

“You were summoned to town, and I now believed that my difficulties were over—it was not so; like Jacob, I had served seven years for Rachel; and was then coolly told to take Leah as my reward. You look amazed; but I am about to explain, and by that explanation to justify myself. You had scarcely appeared in London, when the Duke of Barminster was attracted by your beauty. It is possible that you may scarcely remember a tall, gaunt, large-limbed youth, with pink eyes and yellow hair, who had just escaped from his tutors, after having made a tour in France and Italy; whence he returned with pinker eyes and yellower hair than he set out. Be that as it may, he admired you, and was what in stage-parlance is designed ‘enamoured’ of your fair face and high bred self-possession; nor did Lady Madelaine, whose ambition was flattered by his preference, hesitate covertly to encourage it. Her position was, however, somewhat embarrassing; I was constantly beside her like an accusing spirit which all her spells were unable to lay; and I believe that I should have triumphed even over

the yellow-haired Duke, had not a hint of my pecuniary difficulties been dropped into the eager ear of your mother. Had this hint never been given, Eveleen, it might have been happy for us both ; but this one circumstance became the keystone of all the evil which has since been slowly built up.

“ Lady Madelaine at once availed herself of the information thus received. She had her own reasons for not exciting a feud between us ; while, at the same time, she was equally resolved upon your alliance with the Duke. As yet he had said nothing decisive upon the subject, but that was evidently the effect of shyness, and from the dread of a refusal ; for it was a boy’s love, fearing everything and risking nothing.

“ Secure of my enforced acquiescence in her wishes, from my total inability to gainsay them, your mother, with an *aplomb* which would have done honour to a statesman, took me into her confidence. She admitted that I might have some right to consider myself aggrieved until she explained her purpose—she abhorred the young Duke ; who, had he been no Duke, would not have been presentable in society : but she felt it her duty on such an occasion to sacrifice her own wishes to the interests of her daughter. She reminded me that you were altogether unaware of

the promise which she had made to me—that you still resolutely clung to your girlish fancy for Devereux—that, in short, your sentiments towards myself were rather those of avoidance and dislike, than such as promised happiness in married life. In fine—as a matter of duty to you, and of prudence to me, she had evidently resolved that you should become Duchess of Barminster. ‘And may I ask,’ I inquired with a cool sarcasm which forewarned her of my probable vengeance should she endeavour to make me the victim of her sudden ambition; ‘may I ask what character I am expected to enact in this strange comedy?’ She looked at me steadily for a moment, and then replied—‘Sir James, this little incident must not affect our old and honest friendship. Had I not been assured from what occurred at Rooksley that you felt no overweening attachment to Eveleen, I should at once have negatived the Duke’s pursuit; but, under the circumstances, and knowing also the sincerity of your regard for me, I have acted accordingly. You are aware that I have another daughter; less beautiful than Eveleen I admit, but also without a silly passion in her head.’

“I had already seen your sister, when I travelled with her from Scotland. I remembered only a silent girl, who appeared rather proud than shy; and with whom I did not throughout the

journey exchange a dozen sentences. You may imagine my surprise, my indignation; but my embarrassments had enslaved my will; and, as Lady Madelaine was well aware, I could not contend.

“ I accompanied her to Rooksley, and I confess that I was startled by the change which a few months had effected in the appearance of your sister ; still, the constraint induced by your mother’s presence did not enable me to judge correctly of Adela, whose intellectual expression promised both mind and feeling. Stung by your own haughtiness, and revolted by a coquetry which was almost marvellous for your age, Lady Madelaine had by no means advanced an error when she asserted that my heart had remained untouched. I was dazzled by your beauty, and infatuated by your success ; but it required more than this to resuscitate the long dormant feelings of a man of the world ; and thus you will not be astonished if I submitted with a tolerable grace to a decision against which, under my peculiar circumstances, I dared not appeal ; and resolved to ascertain at once what I was likely to gain or lose at the game of matrimonial shuttlecock which Lady Madelaine had instituted in her family.”

“ And you discovered ?——”

“ I discovered, Lady Dornton, ere long, that in Adela I had found the very being who had it in her power to renew the youth of my heart. I lost no time in returning to Rooksley, and, pleading the permission of your mother. I succeeded in gaining the affections of your sister, before I avowed to her that my visits were unauthorized. You know the independence of Adela’s character, and you will therefore be prepared to understand that this circumstance, although it increased her caution, by no means affected her resolution. We met again and again. The extraordinary resources of her mind, and the noble qualities of her nature, were laid bare before me. She cared nothing for my fashion, nothing for my popularity; she loved me for myself—she loved me as I never hope to be loved again.”

He paused. His lips quivered, and his face assumed an ashy paleness; but he soon rallied, and in a less steady voice, resumed:—“ You will not be surprised that, under these circumstances, I soon blessed the fortunate chance which had thrown the boy-Duke in your path. I was not, however, long destined to enjoy my dream of coming happiness; for on returning to Woodville after one of my hurried visits to your sister, feeling myself unable any longer to control my im-

patience, I urged Lady Madelaine to withdraw Adela from her retreat, and to prepare the minds of her circle for our approaching marriage.

“I had remarked that she was less at her ease than usual, and that something had occurred to ruffle her; but never suspecting that my own happiness could be involved in so trivial a circumstance, I had paid little attention to it. I was soon better informed. ‘Trust to me;’ she said; ‘I feel that I have dealt ungenerously towards you, but it is not yet too late to repair my error. You shall soon be my son-in-law; circumstances have occurred which have changed my views for Eveleen, and I will redeem my word. She shall be your wife!’ I will spare you a description of my feelings. What I instantly suspected, proved to be the fact; the change had not originated with your mother, but with the relatives of the Duke, to whom the comparatively obscure origin of your father, was an objection even more insuperable than the youth and inexperience of the noble blockhead himself.

“Do me the justice to believe that I did not passively submit to this insulting tyranny. I resented it warmly and loudly, but all my violence remained unavailing. I was in the toils, for Lady Madelaine, secured in her position by the pressing nature of my pecuniary necessities, had already

turned aside the triumphant consolations of her dear five hundred friends on the secession of the Duke, by smiling at the absurdity of the report, and asserting your long engagement to myself. Thus we had both too much at stake to continue long at feud. We were necessary to each other—and, you know the rest.”

I was crushed. I had struggled to be firm ; to pay back with cool contempt the perfidy of the man to whom I had been sacrificed ; but I had not sufficiently prepared myself for such an avowal as this. The consciousness of his utter indifference ; the conviction that all his affectation of affection had been false from the first moment of our marriage ; the reflection that I had been a mere tool to conceal the weakness of my mother, and to build up the ruined fortunes of a profligate, cut me to the heart ; and every angry feeling faded before the deep humiliation which bowed me to the earth.

“ And am I then, indeed, wholly and utterly, the victim of my fortune !” I exclaimed, wringing my hands in despair ; “ was it not enough to find myself deceived in my every hope, without being forced to feel that I have been a dupe from my very cradle.”

“ Be rational, Lady Dorn-ton.,” said Sir James, rousing himself with effort from a painful reverie into which he had fallen as he ceased

speaking; "Since you became my wife, of what have you to complain? Have you not profited as fully by the illusion as you could have done by the reality? Have you had one indulgence the less? Has your vanity been the more ruffled, or your self-love the less respected? Look back upon your brief period of married life—what has been wanting which would have grown out of even the idolatry of a husband? Can you complain of the manner in which I have played my part? It is rather I who should complain of the life of struggle and seeming to which the caprice of your mother has condemned me. Let us be honest with each other. You had assuredly no right to calculate upon an undivided affection on my part, when you gave yourself to me with an old love clinging about your heart, which you scarcely cared either to conceal or to combat. I, feeling myself exonerated by the fact, did not persecute you upon the subject, but left time to do its work, assisted by that great ally, the world—and we are, consequently, beyond recrimination upon that point. Why then do you arrogate to yourself the right to accuse me?"

I could not command myself sufficiently to reply: the cold-blooded matter-of-fact reasoning of Sir James at such a moment maddened me.

"I see your agitation;" he resumed: "and

knowing as I do, your utter want of self-command, I am by no means surprised at its violence. Calm yourself, however, if possible, and listen to me for a few moments longer. What I have to say deserves all your attention. This day will probably effect our actual separation, but let us, at least, preserve appearances; it is needless for us to offer ourselves as a spectacle to all London. You have an attachment, of which the object is more than disagreeable to me; nevertheless, amuse yourself, as you have hitherto done; I understand you too well to dread your injuring your own position for any created being. Nevertheless, be careful; for if you are Cæsar's wife remember that I am Cæsar; and I have no inclination to become the laughing-stock of my set."

"How, Sir!" I exclaimed, starting to my feet: "do you, guilty as you are of my sister's death—fallen as you are beneath the contempt of all honest men—do *you* dare to threaten?" And exasperated by his calmness, yet still unable to give utterance to my feelings, I rushed out of my dressing-room, anxious only to rid myself of his presence, which had each moment become more insupportable to me.

Fortunately, he retained all his self-possession; and alarmed at the idea of the scene to which I

was about to expose both myself and him, he sprang after me, and caught me as I was about to escape into the gallery.

“Where are you going?” he asked sternly.

“Anywhere, so that I be not subjected to your presence ;” I said, as I struggled to loose myself from his grasp, but he held me fast.

“Well then, Madam, return to your dressing-room ; I am about to leave it. But I beg that you will not expose yourself to the gossip of your servants in your present undignified state of passion, for your own sake. Have you yet to learn that, in such cases, your own hired domestics are more to be dreaded than all other persons? As for myself, I am careless of their comments ; nay, they would afford me an admirable opportunity of visiting this scene upon Colonel Devereux ; an emergency, which I imagine, you would on your side, rather avoid than provoke. Give yourself the trouble to reflect : and remember that it is not always upon the husband, that the world is apt to visit results like these.”

Again I was compelled to submit. I felt that I was indeed, through my idle folly, at the mercy of a man whom I alike loathed and despised. I had no refuge in my mother, who would necessarily abandon my cause in order to excuse her own conduct ; and, thus left to myself, I was alto-

gether powerless. Profiting by my evident indecision, Dornton led me back to the door of my dressing-room, which I had no sooner reached than I closed it violently behind me, as though I sought to evade the pursuit of an assassin.

As I sank panting upon a sofa, I felt as though my reason would have given way beneath the struggle. The horror of my position rose bare and hopeless before me. The ties which attached me to my husband, and the authority which they gave him over my very thoughts, distracted me as I reflected on them. I had determined on a rupture, but I had been prepared to dictate its terms, and not to find myself thus bound hand and foot at his mercy. The species of menace which he had uttered, and which was merely conditional, still rang through my brain; for I remembered that he might at any moment, and under any pretext, avail himself of it to complete my wretchedness.

Nevertheless, by some strange inconsistency, it was not fear that I felt; blinded by my indignation, I should have considered it a meanness to tremble or to yield, or even to control my actions in any way, at the bidding of a man whom I had saved from ruin, and whom I felt myself authorised to despise. Never had I been in so dangerous a state of mind. Every

feeling was in revolt. I ceased to envy even the quiet grave of my sister. I had vague visions of a vengeance as mighty as the wrongs of which I had been made the victim ; wild, untangible, and aimless for the most part ; but welcome inasmuch as they tended to restore me to some degree of composure, and to people the void into which my first emotions had plunged me.

May those whose hair whitens, and whose necks bow beneath the hand of time, without having undergone such mental struggles as these, be merciful as they pronounce a judgment upon me !

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position. In the excited state of my feelings, I never dreamt of tracing the events of my life to any fault or error of my own. I regarded myself simply as a victim to the machinations of others; and as bound to visit upon my persecutors all the sufferings to which I had myself been subjected. I had the means of vengeance in my hands. It was true that they might recoil upon my own head; but that reflection did not deter me. I was already ruined both in fact and in hope. A life of joyless wretchedness was before me. I could scarcely render my fate more bitter; while, on the other hand, I might enable myself to support it with less suffering. All that the world could offer of adulation, luxury, and indulgence was before me, and within my grasp. The void within my heart might be filled up. I must think no more of home-enjoyments, and home-ties; they were for ever denied to me; but the alternative remained of creating new interests and new bonds without the pale of home.

My decision was irrevocably taken.

When I rose in the morning, my first care was to obliterate the withering effects of the last night's agitation, and to bestow unwonted care upon my appearance. I could not be seen in public so immediately after the death of my sister, but I could at least admit those of my friends

who came to offer me their sympathy in my bereavement; and it is probable that Lady Madeline had decided upon the same prudent and praiseworthy line of conduct, for I heard nothing of her throughout the day. One or two unimportant visits occupied the greater portion of the morning, when at length Colonel Devereux was announced in his turn; and, pleading fatigue, desired that I might be denied to every one for the remainder of the day.

"I may then, indeed, hope that I still number you among my friends," I said, as I extended my hand; "since you come to me in the hour of grief."

"Did you do me the injustice to admit doubt upon the subject?"

"I am afraid so. Many circumstances have occurred to shake my faith in your regard—but I will not dwell upon them now. A friend is too precious to me at this moment, for me to encourage such misgivings."

"Is it Lady Dornton who talks of needing friends?"

"It is, indeed; and Heaven knows that few need them, or would prize them more. You are of course, aware that I have lost my sister."

"I am; and I feel for you most deeply."

"You may do so. It has been a bitter blow

to me in many ways. Do you also know the cause of her early and most unhappy death?"

"I fear, consumption;" he replied anxiously, as he looked attentively at me; "Miss Tilden was naturally of a weak and nervous constitution; and probably sank under her self-constituted isolation from society."

"No, no; do not be disingenuous with me, Colonel Devereux;" I interposed; "you have been too intimately connected with our family not to have learnt the truth; or, if you have indeed been blinded to the fact, be so no longer: my sister died of a broken heart."

"A broken heart!"

"Even so; and now do more justice both to me and to yourself. Your look and accent both betray you. You have nothing to hear from me save what you already know; unless, indeed, that I also am no longer ignorant of the great secret which has changed the whole current of my after-life."

"Lady Dornton, you alarm me."

"And yet you see that I am calm. I have a great work before me, Colonel Devereux. I am like a rudderless vessel, which after having for a long period been borne among sunken rocks and hidden sands without becoming quite a wreck, is suddenly driven far into the open sea, without

chart or compass—into a fearful, limitless, and unknown waste of waters,—to plough its way as it best can to some eagerly dreamt of but uncertain port. I can look back upon the perils which I have survived, but I know not how to direct my course through the vague. Nevertheless it must be done ; I may perish in the attempt, but it shall be made.”

“ Your position is indeed a painful one.”

“ I know it, but I do not shrink. I am only about to exchange one species of suffering for another.”

“ You may be deceiving yourself as to the extent of the evil.”

I smiled bitterly, as I put into his hands the papers which I had brought from Glenfillan. “ Read these ;” I said, with the same unnatural calm ; “ read, and be convinced in how far I still retain the power to cheat myself.”

Devereux shuddered as he ran his eye over the opening sentences.

“ Is this, indeed, the writing of Miss Tilden ?” he asked.

“ It is.—That is the legacy of a sister whom I would fain have loved—that is the dying bequest of Adela. Do you ask me now to doubt ?”

“ This is terrible !”

“ Is it not? Is it not frightful to have incurred a hatred which lived even beyond the grave? And that too by an action to which I was compelled? Had it pleased fate to grant her wishes, I should have been spared the misery that has been visited upon me, and we might both have been happy. The tyranny of my mother, and the mean cowardice of Sir James Dornton had, however, decided otherwise, and it is still I who incur the penalty; it has been my destiny through life to be made at once the dupe and the victim of those about me, and I must be content to drain the bitter draught to the very dregs. Do as I will, I can secure neither affection nor friendship. I am alone in my own misery.”

My firmness began to forsake me, and despite all my efforts, I felt the scalding tears fall upon my cheeks. Devereux was leaning upon his arm, with his face concealed in his spread hand; and for a few minutes we both remained silent.

“ It was most cruel,” he said at length; “ thus to destroy the illusions on which you had built up your happiness.”

“ My happiness!” I exclaimed reproachfully; “ the only happiness that I have ever known has been based on hope—and that hope has never once been realised.”

“ But who could have been so imprudent as to give you this letter ?” he asked, without appearing to have heard my last remark.

“ A person who was unaware of its contents and who believed that they were calculated rather to comfort than to agonize me. Listen to me, Devereux ;” I continued, observing that he had again sunk into silence ; “ you shall have all the details of this painful tragedy ; and then tell me what hope remains for me in this life. I am very young—I have never wilfully caused pain or suffering to any being within the sphere of my influence. Where I have erred it has been through the prompting of others.—Listen to me, for I have much to tell.”

I then briefly recapitulated all the circumstances which had taken place from the moment of our summons to Glenfillan, to the outbreak of my husband on the preceding evening ; only concealing the fact that his own name had been introduced into the reproaches of Sir James. As I told my tale, the words had frequently been smothered by my sobs, and I saw the tears of Devereux stream through his fingers. Amid all my misery I felt a thrill of joy as I detected this proof of sympathy. It was so long since any one had felt for me ! He still remained in the same atti-

tude with his head bowed down over the writing, but he had ceased to turn the leaves.

“Poor Adela!” I murmured after awhile; “even she was not so wretched as I am, for she had, at least, some one to pity and to advise her.”

“Your positions in life were different;” he replied sadly: “many felt that they were free to pity the desolate and heart-stricken Miss Tilden, who could not presume to affect compassion for the gay, admired, and envied Lady Dornton.”

“Does the world indeed envy such as I am?” I exclaimed impatiently; “do you also consider me beyond the pale of sympathy and help?”

“I did so very lately; but now all is changed; and from my very heart I pity you.”

As he ceased speaking he rose, and paced the room with hurried and agitated steps.

“You may, indeed:” I said, wringing my hands: “I am beset on every side. There is no escape for me—none. Every illusion is dissipated; the truth is before me in all its hideous reality—I am unloved—abandoned by all who should have clung to me—by all that could have attached me to life—nor have I even the consolation of feeling that Dornton was the first to blight my happiness.”

As these imprudent words escaped my lips, Devereux suddenly paused, and riveted his eyes upon me with an expression which went to my very heart. There was reproach in them, but it was a reproach so blent with happiness, that my own fell before them. I felt my indiscretion when it was too late.

"Lady Dornton—Eveleen—" he murmured, as he approached me, and laid his hand upon my arm; "I beseech you to consider all the import of your words. Can it be me whom you would reproach? How, in what manner, have I deserved this?"

"Leave me—leave me—" I gasped out; "I am distracted by my grief; and can no longer distinguish friends from foes."

"Not when I am beside you?" he asked deprecatingly; "and yet I too have struggled, I too have suffered: and do you believe, Eveleen, that you had no part in those struggles and in that suffering?"

I had sunk upon the sofa, and buried my face in my handkerchief, which he sought gently to remove.

"Only look at me:" he continued tenderly; "only whisper to me that you do not think so harshly as you have led me to believe."

I was bewildered by agitation. The tones of

his voice brought back upon me the early and happy period of our attachment; it was long since I had heard those tones; and now I trembled beneath them as though they had been fraught with bitterness.

“Leave me—leave me—” I again exclaimed; “I said I know not what—leave me, and forget it.”

“Do not drive me away;” he persisted in the same low gentle accents; “we have too long misunderstood each other, and I have also my tale of care to tell. Nay, do not withdraw your hand; are you not conversing with a friend—a brother—to whom you have just poured out the sorrows of your heart? Listen to me, in your turn. What has passed within the last few moments has determined me to speak. It will be a trial to me to be frank, for I fear that I may chance to wound you by my sincerity, but you will at least learn to know me as I am; and you can then decide in how far I am worthy of your confidence.

“I imagine;” he resumed with evident effort, after a pause which I had made no effort to break; “that you cannot have forgotten our last interview at Rooksley, when I failed to induce you to pledge yourself to me definitively. Your terror and indecision betrayed only too plainly

how little I could rely upon your firmness; and I left you with despair, in my heart, for I felt that all hope was lost."

"Yet you might have made one more effort," I murmured involuntarily. Devereux shook his head sadly.

"Wherefore should I have done so?" It would have served only to torture both yourself and me. Nor would letters have availed me, even had I ventured to risk them; for where my presence and my intreaties had alike failed, a colder medium of intercourse could have effected no favourable result. I learnt your departure from Rooksley and the sensation which you produced in town. Ere long rumours reached me of the assiduities of Sir James Dornton, of whose pecuniary involvements I was aware, as well as of his tact in influencing the mind of Lady Madeline by his flatteries. Next came the news of your marriage, which had taken place before either your mother or your husband deemed it expedient to make it public; and I shall not attempt to tell you the feeling with which I learnt it. I believed at that moment that I might defy the future to inflict another pang as poignant; but I did not know the future. The human heart has a frightful elasticity in suffering—it expands to receive it, whatever may be the shape in which it pre-

sent itself: and new faculties appear to be created for endurance. I learned this truth when I heard that you were on a bed of sickness, and probably of death.

“I believed, and I had a right to believe, that the compulsion under which you had acted, was the sole cause of the danger to which your life was exposed; nor can you picture to yourself how dear you were to me while that belief existed. How often did I not pray that you might submit more calmly to a fatal necessity, and so preserve an existence which was to me more precious than it had ever been, although I could no longer hope to ensure its happiness. And here, at least, Eveleen, my prayers were both heard and answered. I have never regretted that I uttered them; but I have since learnt to feel that the falsehood of those whom we have loved, is worse, far worse than death.”

“Devereux !”

“You were forewarned of my intended frankness;” he pursued; “nor do I fear but you will pardon it. I was then, in this wretched frame of mind when I received a letter from Otterford, who, with the consent of your mother, invited me to Rooksley. Fearing, and yet anxious to see you, and thus judge by my own observation of the actual state of your feelings, I decided upon obey-

ing the summons, although I was more than once on the point of declining the trial, for which I felt each hour less competent. I went, however,—I found you more beautiful than ever; and for awhile I pleased myself with the belief that you had not met me without emotion; but before the close of the evening I despised myself for my fatuity. Never had I seen you in such brilliant, such overpowering spirits. Never had I seen you so boldly challenge the admiration which no one appeared anxious to withhold. Your coldness to Dornton was so extreme that it wore the appearance of a mere heartless coquetry, unworthy of the woman whom I had so long worshipped in my inmost heart; and I resolved not to spend a second night under the roof that sheltered you. The morning still found me firm in that determination; for I had not slept throughout the night. Eveleen, I had not even striven to sleep. The altar upon which I had enshrined my idol was overthrown, and I mourned over the scattered remnants of my last illusion. If I returned on the morrow it was only because your husband, who had decided upon not leaving me for an instant, alarmed me by his jests, and piqued my self-love by some of those trivial but comprehensive witticisms before which the firmest quail at times.

“I was not long in making the discovery that the passion of Dornton was merely acted; that you felt its hollowness; and that wounded pride would soon restore your heart to me; but the same self-esteem which had prevented my uttering one reproach upon your infidelity, also taught me to reject so questionable a benefit. A woman for whom I had felt a mere passing passion would not, perhaps, have found me proof against such a temptation, but with you I scorned so poor a triumph. The renewal of your passion for me must be the mere result of the neglect of Dornton, or of your love for change: and these were not motives which could satisfy an affection like that which I had vowed to you.

“I have now confessed to you the true reasons of my estrangement; I will neither seek to excuse, nor to justify them; for however extraordinary or unnatural they may appear, they have sprung entirely from the one ruling principle of my life.”

Never had I felt so utterly humbled as I was during the time that Devereux had been speaking. How contemptible a picture had he, as if involuntarily, drawn of myself! How had he turned back my thoughts upon all the inconsistencies and errors of the past! And, above all, how had

he abstained from the bitterness and reproach which I had only too well merited. Nevertheless, I endeavoured to justify myself; and forgetting my agitation in my anxiety to redeem myself in his good opinion, I undertook my exculpation with all the warmth which usually accompanies a bad cause; and attempted to found it upon all that I had suffered to redeem my promise to himself.

“Lady Dornton;” he said gravely, as if pained by the weakness of my arguments; “I never believed that you had consented to make me miserable, without an effort to prevent it; but the more energy you had displayed to remain true to your first affection, the more inexplicable was the prompt adhesion of your heart to your new engagements. The little study which I had made of your sex, the reproaches which I had heard lavished upon it, and my own experience, would at that moment, have led me to believe that women were incapable of firmness or fidelity, had not the unhappy fate of Miss Tilden convinced me that they can exert both where they really love.”

Despite my freshly-awakened affection for Devereux, I resented the contrast which he had drawn; and somewhat haughtily expatiated upon

the enforced duties which rendered all indulgence of my past attachment a crime ; while I claimed for myself a virtue of which I knew little more than the name.

“You are not frank, Lady Dornton ;” said Devereux ; “fine phrases may pass with the world, which contents itself with seeming, and rarely looks beneath the surface ; but remember that I have loved you—have read your very heart—and understand all the intricacies of your character. Let us be sincere, at least to each other. Had duty prompted your actions, painful as might have been the experience, I should have respected the severity of your principles, and submitted without a murmur to the coldness which they induced : but I felt too much interest in their analysis to deceive myself. You loved Dornton for a time without caring to inquire too curiously the cause of your sudden passion. You ceased to love him, when he had piqued your pride by his neglect and egotism, with the same uncalculating facility ; and once more your feelings welled back again towards your first affection by the mere strength of habit—”

“I will hear no more !” I exclaimed indignantly ; “again I say, leave me, Colonel Devereux ; I was already sufficiently miserable ; do not continue to add insult to my other wrongs.”

“Lady Dornton, you do me injustice——”

“Be it so; suffer me then to remain in my error. It was left for you to convince me that I had no longer a friend on earth. Be satisfied; you have performed your mission fully and unsparingly. And now, let us meet no more.”

“Let us meet no more!” echoed Devereux in an accent of anguish; “Eveleen—in what a tone, with what a look, do you pronounce the sentence.”

“With the look and tone which best express my feeling, Colonel Devereux; with the decision that is induced by the indignities with which you have just overwhelmed me.”

“And it is those very indignities which should have proved to you the extent, the exacting claims, the jealous scrutiny of my passion;” he replied scornfully; “I have uttered harsh words, I know it; but there were still harsher thoughts within my breast—for my heart was full. It was impossible for me to give vent to my pent-up feelings without permitting their bitterness to overflow my lips; outraged affection is never gentle in its language—smooth phrases were made for hypocrites—truth cares not to round its periods—Eveleen! I have wounded you—you whom I would die to shield from even temporary suffering.”

“Colonel Devereux, this inconsistency——”

“Is weak and contemptible—I know it; but am I to blame if my passion is stronger than my reason? Is it nothing, Eveleen, to inspire a love in which all other feelings and interests are either absorbed or stifled? Is it nothing to see a man who had vowed to forget—to detest—and to despise you—at your feet and at your mercy? Oh, Eveleen, if indeed you ever loved me, let me once more hear you make me the acknowledgment, and I shall almost cease to remember my past wretchedness.”

“You forget that such words from my lips would now be sinful.”

“And have I not sinned for you? Have I not cursed during the night-watches the authors of our disunion? Have I not encouraged a thousand impious hopes, a thousand evil wishes? And am I, even in this, to be the only victim?”

Devereux had flung himself at my feet, he grasped my hands: his very existence seemed to hang upon my reply. And he was the only man whom I had ever really loved. Upon his brow, and in his eyes, I read all the memory of the happy past, when hope was bright before me. I had believed him to be estranged; and there I saw him, more tender, more devoted, more enslaved than

ever. I thought only of him. My mother, my husband, the whole world were forgotten.

"Herbert!" I murmured, as my tears fell upon the hands which grasped my own.

"Eveleen!" he whispered, as he bent his head yet lower, until his forehead rested upon them. "My own Eveleen—once lost, but found again!"

And then there was a deep, unbroken silence yet strange to say, as I sat there with my hands clasped in his, and his head bowed down upon my knees, I felt no sense of error; all was peace and calm; I was like a child which has wept the absence of a mother, and then sinks to rest upon her protecting bosom. I was, however, awakened to reflection, by the first movement of my lover as he at length raised his head, our eyes met, and I felt the scorching blush of shame spread over brow and bosom.

"Rise"—I exclaimed hurriedly, in an accent of dismay; "rise, Devereux, if you really still respect me. This is no posture to assume before the wife of Sir James Dornton."

"It is precisely because I do respect you, Eveleen, that I do not obey;" he replied resolutely; "not as the wife of Sir James Dornton, that invocation is idle—you are but his victim—but for your own sake. You have borne much from me to-day; be forbearing still. What can you fear from me? Have I not loved you

from your very girlhood? Was I not the first to read in your young heart, and to awaken it to life? Were you not morally mine, before you were sacrificed to expediency and convenience? All that has since occurred has been the effect of chance; and we are no longer children to believe that the heart can be trammelled like the hand, and be bestowed at the bidding of another. Eveleen! only whisper once that I am still dear to you."

I could not; but, I was equally unable to withstand the appealing eyes which were earnestly rivetted upon me; and gently withdrawing my hands from the clasp in which they were still held, I parted the hair upon his brow, and bending down, I pressed my lips upon it for an instant. The effect of that unguarded action convinced me of the gravity of the fault which I had committed. Devereux sprang from the floor as if electrified. "I have not then lived in vain!" he exclaimed ardently; "Eveleen, you are still mine; and no power on earth shall again part us."

Terror and remorse restored me at once to composure and to prudence. "Devereux," I said beseechingly, "have pity upon me—upon yourself—you have tried me beyond my strength, and you had not to learn to-day the weakness of my nature. I have no friend, no adviser on earth if

You forsake me—if you put me beyond the pale of your own sympathy. Consider my position—remember my youth—do not teach me to hate myself and to fear even you.” My head sank upon my bosom ; and when he seated himself beside me and clasped me to his breast in silence, I only wept, for I had lost the power to resist.

“ Is this generous ?” I at length sobbed out.

“ Forgive me, Eveleen ;” he said sadly : “ forgive me. I should, indeed, have remembered all this. Forget the madness of a moment, and restore me to your confidence—to your friendship—to your heart. I am alone to blame—and yet—Eveleen—Eveleen—why have we thus been fated to one common misery ?”

The hand upon which his head had drooped trembled beneath its burthen ; his quivering lips were white, and his whole frame shook with emotion.

“ I too am culpable :” I murmured gaspingly “ I should not have forgotten what was due to myself, and to the name I bear.”

As I spoke a fresh cause for anxiety awoke within me. Upon the arrival of Devereux I had pleaded fatigue as a pretext for shutting out all other visitors, and I saw with dismay, on chanceing to cast my eyes upon the time-piece, that several hours had elapsed since his entrance. A

dread of the effects of this imprudence turned me sick at heart : I directed his attention to the fact, but he treated my fears as chimerical, and strove to persuade me that it would pass unremarked. I was, however, so conscious that this hope was vain, and my agitation became in consequence so violent, that he was soon convinced of the inutility of his efforts ; and at length he reluctantly consented to depart, in pity to my terror.

CHAPTER XI.

DEVEREUX had scarcely left the house when Joséphine entered my room unbidden. It was the first time that she had ventured upon such an intrusion, and even agitated as I was, I should have rebuked her for the liberty which she was then taking, had she not at once addressed me in a tone of half-confidence, to communicate the fact that Sir James had returned home two hours previously, and had been about to proceed to my dressing-room, when, on seeing her in the ante-chamber he had inquired if I were alone, to which she had replied by informing him that I was in my morning-room with Colonel Devereux.

"And what prevented Sir James from seeking me there?" I asked, as calmly as I was able.

"I cannot inform Miladi; Sir James looked surprised, perhaps a little angry; then he walked towards Miladi's room; and then he turned back to his own, telling me to let him know when Colonel Devereux left."

“And have you done so?”

Joséphine shook her head significantly: “I take no orders but from Miladi, who might be fatigued, and wish to rest a little after her long visit.”

Alarmed alike by what I heard, and by what I saw, I desired that Sir James might be immediately informed that I was at my toilette, and would join him at the second dinner-bell; and then abandoning myself to the hands of Joséphine, I fell into a painful train of thought. All my courage had departed with Devereux, and I trembled as I sat; the very looks and motions of my attendant inspired me with terror; she evidently suspected a mystery; and what could she suspect that was not calculated to degrade me in my own eyes?

Had I been actually, as well as morally guilty, it is probable that the very extremity of my situation would have inspired me with factitious courage, or have rendered me sufficiently callous to brave its results; but as it was, I shrank before every breath. I dreaded to meet the looks of the footmen during dinner, for how knew I of what comments I had been made the subject? I shuddered as I thought of my mother—of my coming *tête-à-tête* with my husband—but beyond

all other suffering was the dread that I had forfeited all claim to the respect of Devereux.

There, indeed, the iron had entered into my heart! In the enthusiasm and emotion of the moment, alive only to his passion, he had been all tenderness — all adoration — but when the effervescence of feeling had once subsided, how would he look back upon that morning's interview? When my beauty was no longer present to delude him — my tears to unman him — would he not forget all, save my weak and culpable neglect of my duties as a woman and a wife? Had I not been sufficiently forewarned by the scorn with which I had heard him speak of those who had forfeited their position in society? and, although in the eyes of the world I had lost nothing of my purity, I was but too well aware how conscious he himself must be that I had sinned in heart. It is true that he had been alike to blame; but I had not now to learn the impunity of his sex in all that relates to passion. While he could crush me to the earth with his disdain, he could stand proudly erect, and defy my utmost efforts to bow his head even for an instant. How bitterly I felt at this moment, when the reflection came too late, the utter madness of the woman who thus volunteers her own

tortures. How my spirit yearned to recal the past—and alas! how vainly. I fancied that when I had once more met him, I should be more calm; yet the thought of that meeting came over me like a death-pang. What had to him, perhaps, been the mere passing adventure of an hour, might be to me a life-long memory of bitterness. He knew my weakness, and henceforward I was at his mercy.

After a time I began to search at least a partial remedy for the fatal imprudence of which I had been guilty. My heart still yearned towards him with irrepressible affection, but I resolved to stifle its every throb, in order to re-instate myself in his opinion. I determined to be prudent, jealous of every word and action, to avoid every occasion of being alone with him, to gird myself about with caution and reserve; in short, to prove to him that the error of an instant would exert no baneful influence over the future.

Full of this resolve, I descended to dinner with more composure than I had hoped to exhibit. The second bell had rung, and there was barely time for me to receive and return the greeting of my husband before we seated ourselves at table.

Although the presence of the servants prevented all conversation, save those common place remarks and courtesies incident to the meal,

I was at no loss to discover the preoccupation of Sir James. There was a mocking smile upon his lips which made me quiver; and his comments upon my loss of appetite added to the agitation which I struggled painfully to suppress. I had lost my vantage ground even with him.

At length the dinner ended; and, contrary to his usual custom, Dornton left the table at the same time as myself. I was not prepared for this. The quiet hour upon which I had calculated to restore me to at least a semblance of composure was thus denied to me, and I felt that I must at once bow my head beneath the coming avalanche.

"Are you aware, Lady Dornton," he abruptly asked, as the servants withdrew and closed the door behind them; "that I have been at home for several hours?"

"Joséphine informed me that such was the case." I replied in tones which I strove to render indifferent.

"And did she also tell you, may I inquire, that I was about to visit you on my return to the house?"

"I think that she did mention something of the kind, but said that you subsequently changed your mind."

"She doubtlessly added to her other information that I inquired whether you were alone?"

“ She did, and I presumed that this novel observance was consequent upon our last conversation.”

“ By no means. I have sufficient knowledge of the world to be aware that the sudden apparition of a husband may be at times importunate.”

“ I am obliged to you for your consideration.”

“ I accept your thanks willingly, for upon this occasion I can have no doubt of their sincerity.”

I made no reply.

“ To-day, for instance ;” he pursued, in the same accent of assumed deference ; “ I should have been extremely ill-advised to intrude upon a *tête-à-tête*, which, judging from its duration, must have been eminently interesting.”

“ You were perfectly free to act as you saw fit. The subject discussed by Colonel Devereux and myself, was one to which you are no stranger.”

“ I understand, Lady Dornnton ; you were confiding to your early friend all the events which have occurred in the family. The arrangement does infinite credit to the respect which you evince towards those to whom you are bound by the ties of relationship and—duty.”

“ Your susceptibility is misplaced ;” I answered

calmly; "Colonel Devereux was acquainted with the melancholy affair in all its details."

"Ha, indeed! his connection with the family is more intimate than I had hitherto believed. The subject must, in that case, have been skilfully anatomised during a discussion of upwards of three hours, but I readily enter into its several ramifications. The supposed wrongs of your sister naturally led, by an easy transition, to your own; and I had to be tried, condemned, and executed before you parted. Fortunately, Lady Dornton, I hold such a tribunal lightly; while I am rather inclined to fear that it may be attended with more serious results to yourself. Do you consider the proceeding of this morning calculated to ensure you an increased degree of respect? Be assured that not even a French waiting-woman, mounting guard in your ante-chamber, can shut out curious eyes, or quiet slanderous tongues. There is not a lacquey in the servant's hall who could not tell you to second at what time Colonel Devereux was admitted, and at what time he left the house; and who will not consider himself at perfect liberty to draw his own inferences from such a visit."

"Inferences!" I exclaimed angrily: "and pray, Sir James, of what inferences will it admit?"

“The question is ingenuous ! Do you imagine that I am myself the dupe of your having passed nearly four hours alone with Colonel Devereux in sighing over the moral suicide of a wrong-headed girl ? And I believe that you have advanced no other pretext for this extraordinary privy council.”

After my indignant exasperation of the previous evening, nothing could be more ill-judged than a tame concession at the present moment. The terms on which I had parted from my husband gave him, moreover, no right to expect consideration at my hands ; but I was no longer conscience-clear ; I was accused by my own heart, and my own reason ; and, as a natural consequence, I gave way to a cowardice which prompted me to temporize. I therefore affected to be convinced by the reasoning of Dornton, and declared myself awakened to a conviction of my imprudence. I admitted my error without bitterness ; but excused it upon the plea that Devereux was acquainted with the whole of my sister's unhappy story, and that I consequently felt I might without indiscretion, talk of her to him without reserve.

“Perhaps,” I said in conclusion, “I should have acted more prudently had I deferred this conversation for a time ; but in the freshness

of my grief, and confident in the innocence of my own motives, I have blindly subjected myself to misconstruction."

"Blindly!" repeated Dornton, as he elevated his eyebrows ironically; "that is the version of the affair which you are pleased to offer to my acceptance, but you wrong yourself, nothing could be more clear-sighted. There are so few tears, be the sorrow what it may, which a lover's hand cannot wipe away."

"A lover, Sir James!"

"Yes, Lady Dornton; why should you startle at the truth? Do you, by this show of virtuous indignation, wish me to understand that Devereux listened to all your lamentations, without exacting any recompense for his patience? That would indeed be a new *rôle* for a young guardsman in the first harvest of his triumphs! In short, do not attempt to demand an explanation of your proceedings, but I beg you to be assured that I am, in no respect, your dupe."

The words of Dornton were like barbed arrows which, without being mortal, nevertheless wounded me on every side; I could bear no more; I burst into an agony of tears.

"Are you not yet weary of overwhelming me with insult?" I asked bitterly; "have you

nothing more to add which may prove equally offensive to my pride, and painful to my feelings ?”

“ I have this to add, Lady Dornton, that I request you to call to remembrance the wholesome advice which I gave you only yesterday ; advice which you received in no very tranquil spirit, but which you have already shewn to be by no means unnecessary. You have made so rapid a commencement in your career, that you would evidently go farther than even I suspected, were you to remain unchecked ; but, as I have no inclination to hear you quoted as one of those witless women who seem created only to afford a subject for the idle and the vicious, I forewarn you that I still retain the authority of a husband, and that I shall be by no means slow to use it.”

As he ceased speaking he rang, and ordered his carriage ; and then once more turning towards me, he said coldly :—

“ I will now rid you of my presence, Lady Dornton. Two interviews of unmeasured duration in one day might prove too trying for your nerves. I was merely anxious that you should comprehend your true position ; and we will waste no more words upon so ungracious a subject.”

Then bowing sarcastically, he rose, and left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

I WAS no sooner alone, than my thoughts reverted to Devereux, and as I recalled my own words and actions of the morning, all my terror returned upon me. I was already suffering the bitter and humiliating penalty of my imprudence. The impertinence of Joséphine, which I dared not resent, and the taunts of my husband which I could not refute, were the first fruits of my fault. As regarded Devereux himself, I felt the absolute necessity of immediately ascertaining my exact position. The few hours which had already elapsed since our meeting must have afforded time for reflection even to him ; and I panted to be informed of its effect. The difficulty was how to accomplish this.

Even had I possessed a friend upon whose caution I could rely, it would have been impossible to admit a third person into such a confidence. Nothing, therefore, remained save another inter-

view, or a written correspondence. The former alternative was too hazardous under present circumstances; and I consequently decided upon a letter. Having come to a determination on this point, I lost no time in putting it into execution; but, seating myself at once at my writing-table, prepared to pen the letter which was to decide my future conduct. The task was by no means either an easy or a pleasant one; for here again my conscience rose up in judgment against me, and held my ideas in check. The natural result ensued; my style and manner were alike constrained, and the very effort which I made to disguise the fact, gave an artificial and studied appearance to the communication. I had alike to excuse myself, and to conciliate Devereux—to admit my imprudence, and to make it appear a virtue in his eyes;—above all, it was necessary to convince him that my first error was to be my last; and to appeal to his honour and generosity to assist me in my resolve. I implored him henceforward to consider himself only as a friend—an esteemed and dear friend—who could never be more to me in this life; and I concluded by reminding him that I should estimate his respect and regard for me, in proportion to his obedience upon this point.

I was not altogether satisfied with myself as I

closed the letter, but still it was sufficiently dignified to carry with it the aspect of sincerity which I was anxious it should bear. Devereux, I moreover reflected, must be aware of the agitated feeling under which it was written; and would therefore be more inclined to approve than to criticise my tardy endeavour to act prudently.

This done, I became more calm. His reply would necessarily reveal to me the estimation in which he held alike my request and my reputation; and I endeavoured to banish the subject from my mind until it arrived.

Another day had gone by without a word from my mother; but a hurried note from Lord Otterford had informed me that, his mournful duty performed, he had left Lady O'Halloran in safe under the roof of her son, and had himself returned to town. Adela, he said, had requested that an ample provision might be secured to Lady Flora for her life, an arrangement to which he felt convinced I should at once cheerfully accede; and the rather as from the fact of my sister having died in her minority, I had become sole heiress to my father's wealth, as well as the remainder of Lady Madelaine's jointure. He alluded also to the lease of Glenfillan, which was at my disposal and where, he added, Lady Flora wished to reside until I should see fit to give it another tenant.

All these details interested me but little. I replied briefly that I left every thing in his hands, and should be ready to subscribe to any arrangements which he might deem advisable. I had already suffered so bitterly from the possession of wealth, that its increase rather alarmed than gratified me. There was, moreover, something saddening in the conviction that all was, indeed, now over with the unhappy Adela; she was no longer upon earth; they had laid her at the feet of her maternal grandfather, who little dreamed when he bartered his favourite child for gold, how soon one of his victims would moulder within a foot of his own bier!

On the following day my mother made her appearance, clad in deep sables, but with little of the mourner in her look and manner. Her husband, on the contrary, was visibly depressed; the broken heart which he had just followed to the grave had probably reminded him of another, in which he had more share.

Her first inquiry was for Sir James, of whose movements I could give her no information. Her next related to the contents of the packet, of which Lady O'Halloran had informed Lord Otterford. "If it contained a will;" she said coldly; "you are of course aware that it is a mere mockery, as your sister died a minor, and had

consequently no control over her property while any request which she may have made is in no way binding, as her whole career has proved her perfect inability to judge rightly upon any subject."

"Her letter made no mention whatever of money matters;" I answered; "had it done so I should at least have had the gratification of fulfilling her last wishes."

Lady Madelaine shrugged her shoulders, but could not entirely conceal her uneasiness. "It is at least satisfactory;" she resumed; "that she did not leave the earth as thoroughly estranged from all her family as she had lived, since she favoured you with so voluminous a confidence in dying."

"In one respect;" I answered, as I struggle to suppress the agitation which was gaining upon me; "it is indeed, satisfactory, for I at length know my actual position, to which I was before worse than blind. I am forewarned for the future."

"That Adela had bequeathed to you some sentimental folly which had not tended to render you more docile or more rational, has already been hinted to me by your husband," said Lady Madelaine unguardedly.

"If you allude to a communication made by

Sir James Dornton, Madam;" I interposed resolutely; "it is needless for me to enter into any further explanation, except that I no longer recognize that individual as my husband."

Lady Madelaine bounded upon her seat.

"My dear Eveleen;" said Lord Otterford, affectionately taking my hand; "do nothing rashly. You know not—you cannot guess the trials and dangers to which so young a person as yourself must be exposed, should you be so unguarded as to make the misjudged confidence of your sister the subject of a rupture with Dornton. Should your after-life be as pure as heaven, it would, nevertheless, be embittered by a thousand pangs."

"I am so conscious of it, my Lord, that I have already tacitly consented to the proposition of Sir James that we should mutually avoid all public scandal; more than that he did not see fit to exact; and he was wise, or I should probably have conceded nothing."

"You have acted prudently, Lady Dornton," observed my mother, with an expression which I could not mistake.

"Yet still it would be advisable," persisted Lord Otterford; "if this unfortunate affair could be forgiven and forgotten. You are very young, Eveleen, and should you maintain your present resolution, a long life of disquiet and disgust is

before you. You can never feel the happiness of home, the delight of a full and free companionship with the man to whom you have given yourself."

"Say rather, my Lord, to whom I have been given."

"Remember, too," he pursued, affecting not to have heard my interpolation; "that Sir James is a man of fashion, courted, and caressed wherever he appears. Are you wise thus to risk still greater trials?"

"Your meaning is a kind one, I am convinced; I said composedly; "but Sir James Dornton is in every respect his own master, and need apprehend no interference from me. Whatever may tend to promote his absence from a home for which he is indebted to my fortune, and for which he has made so manly and honourable a return, I shall always hail with delight. Your fears are, however, I suspect groundless; my most dangerous rival will be the dice-box; and, moreover, I love to believe that no man can at once forget the victim whom his own perfidy has destroyed."

The words had scarcely passed my lips, ere I upbraided myself for their utterance. The effect was painful; and the stab must have been the keener from the consciousness of the sufferer that the hand which dealt it knew where to

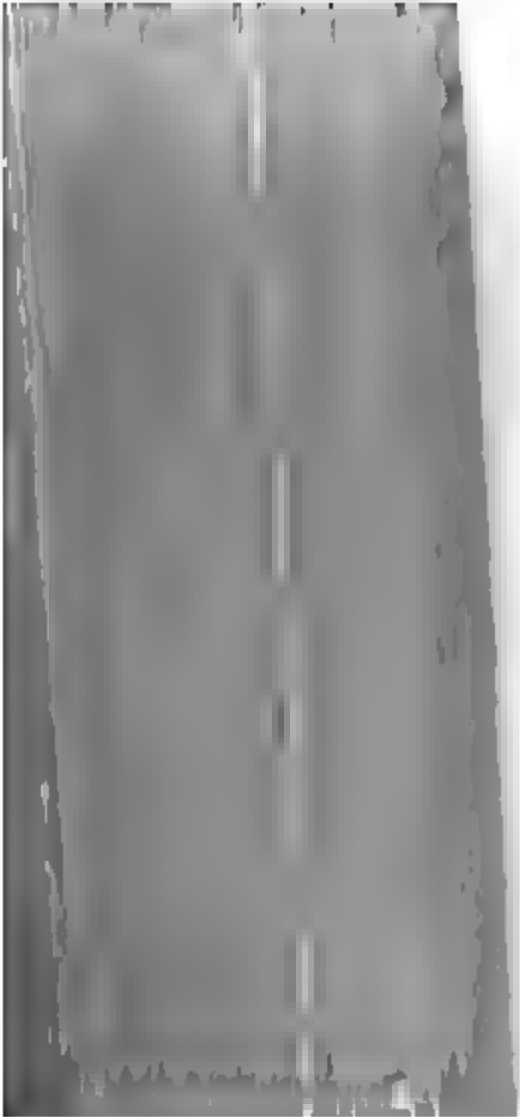
wound would be vital. Lord Otterford was silenced. I had rewarded him cruelly for his well-meant interference; but embittered as I was by my recent trials, I regarded him only as the tool of his wife, and was anxious to rid myself at once of a new opponent. I was confirmed in this belief by the silence in which Lady Madelaine had listened to our dialogue. She was evidently aware that her own power over me was shaken, and wished to try the effect of her husband's more conciliating arguments.

"You are then resolved to assume the heroine, Lady Dornton;" she said, as she remarked that Lord Otterford had, incomprehensibly to her, withdrawn from the combat; "in another week you will be the laughing-stock of all London."

I smiled sarcastically.

"And if this prospect do not deter you;" she pursued with rising anger; "understand at once that I will never consent to a course of such egregious folly."

"The same bequest which exonerated me from all supposed duty to my husband, freed me equally from all enforced obedience to your Ladyship. The hand of Miss Tilden was bartered at your pleasure; bandied from Duke to Commoner; resumed, and again bestowed, as it suited your convenience; but the dignity of Lady Dornton is



ried me."

Lady Madelaine
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and extended
a letter. My

with this *maudite lettre* ; and my lady is so *abattue* and *triste* in her mourning dress !”

“ Joséphine,” I asked ; “ from whom did you receive this letter ?”

“ Miladi must not be angry ;” said the French-woman with affected humility ; “ but I watched for the valet of *Monsieur le Colonel*, to bring it myself to Miladi.”

“ And how knew you,” I again inquired with difficulty, for my heart throbbed with such violence that it almost choked my words ; “ how could you know that Colonel Devereux was about to write ?”

“ Miladi forgets that she did not leave her letter upon the table *à son ordinaire*, but commanded me to see that it was delivered safe. I did as Miladi bid me. I took it where it was sent ; and then I waited for the answer that it might come safely too.”

I could find no fitting reply to so circumstantial a rejoinder, and therefore made a gesture that my too intelligent attendant should leave the room, which she did with the same affected caution as she had entered.

The letter was indeed from Devereux, and I trembled with impatience as I tore it open. It afforded the most perfect contrast to my own. Brief, simple, sincere, and manly ; he acquiesced

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fice as I had thus volunteered, could indeed be requisite.

Suddenly a new inspiration dawned upon me. The ready compliance of Devereux removed, at least for the present, all danger of interference from either my mother or Sir James. I would await only the close of my mourning to plunge freely into the world. I must inevitably meet him everywhere, but it would be in a crowd ; he would understand and appreciate a thousand trifles which would pass unheeded by those around us ; I should no longer feel desolate and unloved, for he would be near me—and that too without peril, and without blame.

Meanwhile I rarely saw Sir James ; and when we met it was with a cold and ceremonious politeness which scarcely amounted to courtesy. I knew that he played high, and that his losses were occasionally serious ; but for this I cared nothing ; nor should I have bestowed the slightest attention on his altered habits, had he not, on the first occasion of my receiving company after my sister's death, absented himself from home, and thus given reason for those suspicions against which he had so strenuously urged me to guard myself. This circumstance induced me to watch him more narrowly ; and I was not long in discovering that his character had totally changed.

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the moment, had overlooked the ailments of her lord, and must, consequently, confide herself to the protection of her son. Secure in his mother's presence, I was safe from all remark or animadversion ; and I looked forward to the pageant of the evening with an anxiety which might have forewarned me that I was preparing for no common spectacle.

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dear five hundred friends, and was quietly making a circuit of the house with my *lorgnette*, when the door of the private box which immediately faced my own was flung back, and a handsome woman about ten years my senior, showily and not altogether correctly dressed, entered, and leaned for a moment into the broad light of the chandelier; while a pair of bold but magnificent black eyes wandered over the audience. She wore no powder; neither had she polluted her cheeks by the coat of rouge which was at that period considered almost indispensable to female beauty: but masses of raven curls fell upon the ample shoulders which would otherwise have been bare; and the glow of conscious triumph lent a bloom to her cheek, and a fire to her glance. A mantle of black velvet edged with ermine had fallen from her neck as she entered, and was only upheld by the whitest and most finely modelled arms that I ever remembered to have seen. There was, in short, an originality in her beauty which enforced admiration, even while its audacity blended the homage with a feeling for which it was difficult to account.

I was gazing with this vague sensation upon the proud woman before me, and was inquiring her identity of Colonel Devereux, when a movement took place in her box; and as she stepped

the act of seeing him
from the grasp of his
glass once more to
attentive cavalier—

“That,” said
question which I
brated Mrs. Delar
went over to Italy
month or two ago
Florence and Mila
in London.”

“And where is
gazing attentively !

“Not where y
laughed Lady Dev
yeux doux to this !

“So I perceiv
upon his taste an
her own ?”

“In his grave

Devereux sighed audibly.

Henceforth the stage and the audience lost all their interest for me. I felt that the enigma which had lately bewildered me was solved. Dornton was in the snare of the syren. For the abstract fact I cared nothing; but no married woman can coolly look upon so public a demonstration of neglect without mortification. That he had not anticipated my presence in the house was probable; but it was still more certain that he had taken no pains to avoid so disagreeable, and disgraceful an encounter.

“Am I not justified?” I asked in a low voice, as I turned towards Devereux.

He frowned, turned pale, and made no reply.

Suddenly the eyes of Mrs. Delamaine rested upon me; and, with a smile, she addressed some remark to the pale and spirit-broken looking woman who sat beside her. There was a condescending expression of admiration in her gaze which brought the proud blood to my cheek; never had I felt so indignant. As my heart throbbed beneath her glance, she turned her head and addressed Dornton, who had hitherto remained in the back of the box, but who bent forward evidently at her bidding, and started as he encountered my glance. For a moment he appeared irresolute, but only for a moment; and

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fashionably dressed man was now sweeping the boxes with his *lorgnette*.

“ I see the handsome Delamaine is in full force ;” he observed, as he seated himself upon a chair which was only divided from my own by the thin partition, and the folds of the curtain, which he had carelessly pressed back with his elbow.

“ Yes, and I see also that she has brought down her bird ;” answered a second voice, equally careless of being overheard : “ I thought that Dornton was likely to be the next on the list, when I met them at Ranelagh ; but although he has almost lived in her house for the last three weeks, I did not quite expect to find the affair advertised so soon in public.”

Devereux was about to speak, but I motioned him to silence ; and, like myself, he became all ear.

“ It was a mystery known to half London, which was not worth any further affectation ;” retorted the first speaker : “ moreover no one now asks of the Delamaine how is it ? but simply who is it ?”

A faint sickness crept over me. It was then for such a fallen woman as this that insult had been heaped upon me ; I know not to what lengths my indignation would have carried me,

had I not at that very moment felt the hand of Devereux stealing gently to my waist. My head drooped, and a painful feeling of humiliation rendered me once more passive.

“Dornton is a blockhead;” resumed the second stranger: “he no sooner cajoles an old flirt into giving him her daughter and some ninety thousand pounds, than he begins to play the Lothario. They say that the girl never loved him, and that, handsome as she was, he returned the compliment. Still, there was some consideration due to the woman who paid his debts, and patched up his lost credit; but it is always the case with fellows on the wane; they can never amuse themselves quietly, but must always have a crowd to look on.”

The attention of the strangers was now attracted to some other group, and I heard no more of the subject in which I was interested; but I had heard enough; and coldly withdrawing myself from the clasp of Devereux, I requested him to ascertain if my carriage were in waiting, as I was anxious to return home. Lady Devereux, who had also seen, and been seen, as much as she considered necessary, declared her intention of following my example, to the evident discomfiture of her son, who accordingly quitted the box in quest of our servants.

“Do you know, Eveleen;” said my companion, as he left us together: “that the conduct of Sir James to-night is quite too bad. If Sir Herbert had ever *affiché* himself in such a way when we were young people, I should have been furious; and there you sit as calmly as though he had never entered the house.”

“You probably loved Sir Herbert, my good friend, and I am totally indifferent to Sir James;” I said, forcing a smile; “and there you at once discover the secret of my composure.”

“But consider the imprudence into which such a *liaison* may betray him. Women of that stamp are expensive toys.”

“Not more so than the gaming table.”

“Oh, you are then aware of Dornton’s failure in that respect. I am sure I warned your mother a hundred times of the risk she ran in making you the wife of such a man.”

“He was her alternative for Mr. Curties.”

“Mr. Curties!” echoed Lady Devereux: “She had no opportunity of choosing between them. Had you been the Medician Venus in petticoats, you would have made no impression upon that block of living marble.”

“Yet I was led to believe——”

“My dear Lady Dornton;” said my companion, in the same tone in which she would have

lamented the naughtiness of a spoiled child ; " all your life you have been so easily led to believe anything."

Any reply was rendered impossible by the reappearance of our cavalier, who announced that the carriages were drawn up. With a prudence, partly suggested by the presence of Sir James, and no doubt increased by my own coldness, Devereux carefully enveloped his mother in her wraps, leaving me to adjust my own shawl ; after which he tendered an arm to each, and we left the house. As I resolutely declined his escort, he put me into my carriage, and then handing his mother into hers, he made a low and somewhat constrained bow, and returned to the theatre.

I arrived at home perfectly satisfied with myself ; but still marvelling what would be the effect of my repelling manner upon Devereux. The sight of the bold beauty of Mrs. Delamaine, and the light tone in which she had been spoken of, had struck to my heart like a solemn warning : and had the impression lasted, it is probable that I should have been a wiser and a better woman as it was, this impression was weakened by the feeling of self-justification induced by the off-falling of my husband.

I was still in my dressing-room on the follow

morning, when, to my astonishment Dornton made his appearance. He had assumed an expression of unusual amiability, through which I could nevertheless detect a tinge of embarrassment, that he struggled vainly to conceal.

“You took me by surprise last evening, Lady Dornton ;” he said, as he threw himself into a chair ; “I did not know that you had determined altogether to emerge from your seclusion ; and, when I discovered you—acting upon the principle which I announced some time ago—I forbore all intrusion. What did you think of the beautiful woman whom I had the honour to escort ?”

“That you were quite worthy of the honour which had devolved upon you.”

Sir James bit his lip, and was visibly disconcerted.

“She is indeed a charming person ;” he said after a moment ; “and would make a delightful addition to your circle.”

“To *my* circle, Sir James ! If you are in a facetious mood, I entreat that you will select a more seemly subject for your wit.”

“I am perfectly serious ; I see no jest in the suggestion I have made.”

“It is then intended as an insult ?”

“Really, Lady Dornton, you are inexplicable. Can it be, that, in your character of a pretty

woman, you are jealous of her attractions? **Such** a suspicion would be degrading to you, and utterly **contemptible.**"

"Your affected ignorance does not **impose** upon me for an instant, Sir;" I said haughtily; "you must be perfectly aware of the **cause which** prevents any recognition of the person to **whom** you allude from me: or, should you indeed **be** unconscious of the character of your new friend, permit me to enlighten you."

"I have no taste for women's gossipry; and I defy you to prove anything against Mrs. Delamaine."

"The defiance is amusing;" I retorted contemptuously: "a divorced wife, the widow of a suicide, and the mistress of——"

"Proceed, Lady Dornton."

"Of a gambler."

The blood flashed in a crimson tide over the forehead of Sir James. I was evidently better informed than he anticipated.

"You are, as usual, the dupe of some one who profits by your weakness;" he said, striving to rally; "Mrs. Delamaine is amiable, estimable, and accomplished. She would grace any circle which could secure her."

"You allude doubtlessly, to the circles of the lobbies and the gaming-houses."

This was the spark which ignited the fire that was raging in the bosom of Dornton. He, hitherto the most immoveable, the most self-possessed of men, became the most violent under the influence of the new and overwhelming passion of which he was the victim. His retort was passionate and bitter. Not a trait of my past life escaped him which could be tortured into invective. I was not slow in paying back the injury. I reproached him with his meanness, his falsehood, his ignoble submission to the will of an imperious woman; the ruinous effects of his vices; the waste which he had made in a fortune which he could not call his own. He staggered under my vehemence, and uttered in a tone of bitterness the name of Devereux. I defied him to prove his accusation. He forbade me to see him again; I defied him in the same tone; and overcome at length by the storm which he had himself provoked, he sprang from his seat, and left the room.

I felt that once more I had conquered; but it was a painful triumph, for I had achieved it at the expence of that dignity which I had hitherto maintained. My whole spirit was up in arms; I felt degraded, but not disheartened. A resolute defiance blinded me to my own defects, and kept those of Sir James constantly before me: and in

this frame of mind I descended to the drawing-room.

My first visitor was Devereux. He came, as he alleged, at the desire of his mother, who was anxious to ascertain that I had reached home in safety; and then he apologised for an intrusion which, he asserted, from my manner on the preceding evening, he felt to be almost inexcusable.

“Had you not forgotten our compact?” I asked reproachfully, as a deep blush mounted to my brow.

“I throw myself on your mercy. I was not aware that your exaction was so extreme.”

“We will talk no more of it:” I said hurriedly. “I hastened home as an escape from a new and serious annoyance, but it was not so easily to be evaded. Sir James has declared himself my friend and champion, if not something more than this, of Mrs. Delamaine—of the Cleopatra of last night—I have already experienced the bitter fruit of this new indignity. He has been with me this morning to suggest that I should receive him as a friend. What is your opinion of this proposal?”

“That it was disgraceful on the part of Lady Dornton’s husband. And what did you reply?”

“All that was befitting; without attempting to

disguise the contempt which I felt alike for him and for his *protégée*."

"Your refusal was correct and necessary: your contempt would have been better suppressed. It is dangerous to provoke the hatred of the vicious. I do not believe that Dorn-ton himself is radically wicked, but he is very weak, which frequently produces the same results."

I had expected that Devereux would have shared my exasperation, and exhausted himself in invective against my tormentors; and I was, consequently, quite unprepared for this rebuke. So much composure, contrasted with my own violence, appeared to me to be misplaced; and in every point of view, a proof of his indifference. I was not without a consciousness that no married woman can with safety to her own peace and honour, make a confidant of any young male friend, let the extent of their intimacy be what it may; and I was accordingly the more moved by this apparent want of interest in my anxieties, that I had wilfully rushed into a peril which had produced such inadequate results.

I reproached Devereux for his want of sympathy.

"You do not act fairly with me, Lady Dorn-ton;" he said in a subdued tone; "last night you crushed me with your displeasure for a simple

change of position ; and to-day you accuse me of coldness because I restrain my feelings, and compel myself to assume a composure which would but too readily give way before very different emotions."

"Perhaps I am wrong;" I replied, as I turned towards him with a smile which expressed the conviction of my own error more fully than many words; "I will even try to believe so; but you must at least admit, on your side, that you are strangely inconsistent in your friendship. You bring the stoical philosophy of Cato to the hearth-rug of the drawing-room; and exhibit it at all times and seasons. Nothing destroys your equanimity—at least nothing that one would voluntarily provoke—and you give advice where you are only asked for sympathy."

"You know how deeply, how earnestly, I feel for you."

"I would not willingly doubt it; but still, in your present mood, I have a suspicion that you would subscribe, without opposition, to the command which I have received to close my doors against you."

"Decidedly, if by so doing I could secure your happiness—but who has suggested such a proceeding?"

"That, I should imagine, is a riddle by no

means difficult to read ; but I indignantly repulsed a mandate which I should have felt degraded by admitting."

"The arrangement would have been as absurd as it was ill-judged ;" replied Devereux, still in the same quiet accent ; "as, in order to prevent our meeting, you must have discontinued to visit your own mother, and to appear in the world. Nevertheless, as I would not willingly compromise you even for an instant, I shall, thus warned, confine my appearance in your own house to those distant and necessary courtesies which are incumbent on me as a family connection."

"I was prepared for this decision ;" I exclaimed bitterly : "nothing costs you any effort ; and you do not give yourself the trouble to reflect upon the probable consequences of a sudden neglect, which cannot fail to be remarked by those about me. But it will, perhaps, be better so ; totally abandoned to the violence and ill-will of Dorn-ton, he will have less trouble in ultimately ridding himself of his victim ; for I feel that, alone and unsupported, I shall not long have strength to contend against the trials to which I am exposed."

"Lady Dorn-ton, do you accuse *me* of want of reflection ? Were my feeling towards you other than it is, I should not venture to remind you of the danger of wilfully exciting the animosity of

those by whom you may be seriously injured. Let the thunder-cloud which you have invoked pass by."

"You use strong expressions on a very inopportune occasion;" I retorted peevishly; "and you appear to look upon everything through a gloomy medium. I was, perhaps, myself startled by the outbreak of Dornton at the moment, but the reflection of an instant, for which I am indebted to your want of sympathy in my trials, has sufficed to re-assure me. Sir James is weak—you have yourself admitted this fact—he dreads a public rupture, and he is ruled by my mother. His lofty words can produce no fruit. He is too exquisite an egotist to drive to extremity the woman to whom he owes his ease."

"But suppose, fair casuist, that Lady MacLaine should not support you in your opposition; how could you assist yourself without her aid?"

"Oh, pray do not let us amuse ourselves by supposing improbabilities. Act as you see fitting. I can make no claim upon either your sympathy or your assistance; and you shall yet learn that I am possessed of sufficient firmness to resent the insult which I have received from the man whose name I bear."

I was disposed to quarrel even with Devereux, because he had exhibited more respect for me

than I was prepared to exact. It had been my misfortune through life to pre-arrange all the actions of others in connection with myself; and the consequent result was perpetual disappointment. I was even yet too ignorant of human nature—thanks to my self-confidence, which admitted no lessons save those which struck right to the heart, and left their scars behind them—too unsuspicious of its subtlety, to suspect that the coldness of which I had condescended to complain, was the result of a delicate tact on the part of my companion, who, believing himself sure of his victory, preferred the smooth diplomacy of a Talleyrand to the less temporizing prowess of an Alexander. Devereux was a man of feeling and refinement, who sought rather to win me from myself than to surprise me into a weakness; and he, unfortunately, knew enough of my natural temper and disposition, to consider time and caution as his best allies.

It need scarcely be stated that when he left the house, I felt thoroughly dissatisfied both with him and myself. I had conceded too much, and he too little. I had wounded my own pride, and he had trampled upon it as it lay prostrate before him. I had now only one resource. My home had become a desert, my mother a stranger, my husband an enemy, Devereux a censor; and I

stood alone. There was, however, stretching along between the dark and yawning gulfs which had swallowed up my past and my future hopes, one narrow pathway strewn with flowers, and radiant with sunshine. The world was still before me! I could revenge myself on destiny.

CHAPTER XIV.

My toilette on the evening of that day was more *recherchée* than ever; my rouge more glowing, and my eyes more bright. I went alone to the Opera-house; and my box was filled in succession by all the gay and idle men of fashion who had the *entrée*. Never had I been so gracious to the one sex, or so sarcastic on the subject of the other; and before the conclusion of the ballet, I found that, to the reputation of a beauty, I had added that of a wit. My success was complete. I had divided the attention of the house with Grassini and Tramezzani. I was intoxicated alike by the praises of the men, and the affected disdain of the women; and in this mood of mind, I drove from the Haymarket to the ombre and basso party of a young and lively foreign Ambassador; where, without having suffered myself to waste one moment on reflection, I discovered as I reached home that I had emulated Sir James

THE CONFESSIONS OF

elf at the gaming-table; made myself a
ect of general remark; and created more than
enemy. But as this did not, in my present
od of mind, affect me for a moment, I entered
e house humming an aria of Grassini, to which
ought to have given my attention while she was
inging it; and on reaching my dressing-room
perceived for the first time the absence of José-
phine, for whom I rang somewhat impatiently.
My summons was answered by an attendant who
had been accustomed to assist her in her duties,
and who presented herself upon the threshold
somewhat timidly.

“What means this?” I asked imperiously;
“where is Joséphine?”

“Mademoiselle Joséphine was dismissed by Sir
James, my lady, soon after your ladyship left the
house; and I was ordered to await your ladyship’s
return, and to perform her duties.”

“In that case,” I said coldly; “you may at
once retire to rest, as I am not accustomed to
accept the services of strangers about my person.”

The woman withdrew; and, taking one of the
lights from my toilette-table, I walked at once to
the dressing-room of Sir James; resolved to de-
mand an explanation of the extraordinary step
which he had taken. So gratuitous an interference
with my personal establishment was an imper-

nence on his part which to me appeared the heaping of "Pelion on Ossa"—the culminating point of injury. I could not disguise from myself that it was intended as a trial of strength; and this conviction determined me to resent the insult.

The surprise of Dornton, on entering his apartments at daybreak may be imagined, to see me, still covered with jewels and draped in satin, occupying a fauteuil beside the hearth; especially when he remembered our present estrangement. I however left him no time to comment upon the singularity of the circumstance.

"I am here, Sir James;" I said haughtily; "to inquire by what right you have dismissed my waiting-woman?"

"You are easily answered, Lady Dornton; by the right of a husband who will not suffer under his roof the agent of his wife's intrigues—the confidante of his wife's disgrace."

"Explain yourself, Sir."

"Joséphine was your letter-carrier. Do you require any further detail?"

"Sir James Dornton, I will no longer submit to this tyranny,—to this dictation. I am at length determined to assert myself."

"We have, in that case, formed a mutual resolution; for, conscious that my supineness and indulgence have already produced an ill effect

both upon your feeling and your conduct, I will henceforward compel you to respect both yourself and me; and to yield implicit obedience to my will, be it what it may."

The harshness and assumption of this reply produced a very different effect upon me from what he had evidently anticipated. I answered in as high a key, and our dissension became even more violent than that of the previous evening. We had no longer any terms to keep with each other. To the name of Devereux I responded by that of Mrs. Delamaine; to his taunts of my general levity, I opposed his own extraordinary influence with my mother; and was even so far misled by my passion as to hint, that in all probability, it was a mystery which would not safely admit of solution.

"You are a disgrace to your sex;" thundered out Sir James, as he retreated a few paces; "leave the room, Madam; and deliver me from the presence of a woman for whom nothing is sacred."

"I go, because I am anxious to retire to rest," I said with a contemptuous smile; "and I leave you to your dreams of the past; for in your projects for the future you have sadly deceived yourself."

"Time will shew;" was his reply, as he

abruptly turned his back on me, and rang for his valet.

I was now in open rebellion ; and, strange to say, I felt happier than I had done for months. I no longer hesitated to display my preference for Devereux whenever we met in society ; while at the same time I indulged in a general system of coquetry, which at length compelled my mother to interfere. It will easily be understood, however, in what spirit I received her reprimand. I talked of the past ; and inquired if I had ever committed myself with Colonel Devereux, as she had, during my father's lifetime, compromised her own dignity with the man to whom she had subsequently married her daughter, and afterwards with her present husband.

“ Believe me, Madam ;” I concluded sarcastically : “ the reproof falls pointless from your lips ; for our fate has been more similar in life, as well as our actions, than you appear willing to comprehend. Your noble father married you to a commoner in order to secure his wealth : my noble mother married me to a *roué*, in order to secure his—friendship : my husband rendered himself conspicuous by breaking the heart of my own sister—while yours—”

“ Speak, Lady Dornton :” almost shrieked my mother, wounded in her tenderest point—her

vanity; "Speak! what is it that you dare insinuate?"

"I insinuate nothing;" I replied, triumphant at the effect which I had produced, and forgetful of all, save the gratification of the moment: and, most and worst, of the kindly feeling which Lord Otterford had invariably exhibited towards me; "I insinuate nothing; but merely advise you to inquire of *your* husband, the exact nature of the consumption which laid poor Emily Vernon in a foreign grave."

"Eveleen, you are a fiend!" gasped out Lady Madelaine, with clasped hands, and quivering lips.

"I am what you have made me. One of your victims has already paid the penalty of her parentage; but the other is before you, prepared to contend rather than to suffer."

"Only tell me that you have spoken at random, and that there was no covert meaning in your words!"

"I have no more to say upon the subject."

"But, Lady Dornton, I insist—"

"Uselessly, Madam; and as it is now time that I should dress for court, you must pardon me for leaving you, should you desire to prolong your visit," and curtseying ceremoniously I left the room.

Strangely, pitiably, had my feelings become perverted. The knowledge that I had revenged my wrongs upon my mother gave me an energy, which made me dazzling. I felt no weariness during the period of my toilette, tedious as it was, for my thoughts were fully occupied ; and when I fell into the rank to proceed to St. James's, I had never been more satisfied with myself, for I had found in my dressing-room a magnificent bouquet of exotics, about which my new attendant affected to know nothing, while she was aware that her silence told me all.

As the carriages moved slowly onward, I pressed the gorgeous flowers to my lips more than once ; and when I at length arrived at the Palace, I found myself surrounded by adulation and flattery ; my spirits rose still higher, and I scarcely heeded the shrugs and sneers which I occasionally detected in the courtly crowd. I had accepted the arm of Colonel Devereux upon the staircase, and my first care was to thank him for his elegant and well-timed present. He merely smiled his reply, and pressed my arm more closely against his side. But in the Throne Room my triumphs ceased. The Queen looked coldly upon me ; and the Princesses affected to be discoursing, and not to be conscious of my approach. From the Princes I received my usual

greeting, but I felt that my popularity at the palace was at an end.

"*Tu as échouée, ma chère !*" said my friend the Ambassador, when we again met in the crowd. She might have spared me the assurance, for I knew it.

I murmured my indignation to Devereux, but he only chid me for my weakness, in regarding as an affront the caprice of a straight-laced old lady while he reminded me of the admiration which I had elicited from the Prince of Wales; and I was obliged to accept this as compensation, and affect to laugh at my own sensitive folly. The blow had been struck, however; but instead of inducing me to redeem the past, it only fortified me in the belief that I must make myself independent of the world, as I had already done of all home ties: that I must, in short, rely upon my own strength, and demonstrate to the utmost how entirely I had been misjudged. Colonel Devereux did not put me into my carriage until he had arranged to join me at the Opera: and I arrived at home at an unusually late hour, the Drawing Room having been a full one.

When I drove to the door, I was surprised to see the carriage of Dornton, with four post-horses, move a few paces forward to allow of my approach; but as I cared little for his personal arrangements,

I made no inquiry as to the cause of its appearance there, and at once proceeded to my room. No doubt, he was, like myself, wearied of the constant conflicts which now characterised our domestic *têtes-à-têtes*, and was about to vary the scene by a visit to some distant friend, perhaps to escort Mrs. Delamaine to the coast. Be it as it might, I only congratulated myself on his approaching absence; and heartily wished him a long and prosperous journey.

Nothing could be either more specious or more probable than these conjectures: and assuredly, nothing was ever more opposite to the truth.

At the door of my ante-room I found the valet of Sir James, who requested me to pass in the first place into the library, where his master was awaiting my return. I was annoyed at this, for I was in no humour to encounter him at that moment; and as I slowly advanced in the direction indicated, I sought for an instant some sufficient pretext for refusing the interview.

"Tell Sir James:" I said just as I reached the door; "that I am overcome with fatigue, and will receive him to-morrow morning in my dressing room."

As I ceased speaking, I turned upon my heel, and was just congratulating myself upon my es-

cape, when the door opened, and Sir James appeared upon the threshold.

“ You have returned late ;” he said, as he held it open for me to pass : “ the horses have been put-to more than an hour.”

“ And what can there be in common ;” I asked, as I advanced rapidly into the room, in order that his servant might not be a party in the discussion ; “ between your post-horses and my return ?”

“ Do you not guess, Madam ? You are now sufficiently compromised to leave town, I should imagine, without regret ; but, be it as it may, you must leave it, and that instantly. Common propriety exacts it, your mother insists upon it, and I will have it done.”

“ Do you mean to assert that my mother is cognisant of this tyranny, and that she ventures to authorise it ? I will not be so imposed upon. My sister is as yet scarcely cold in her grave, and she cannot so soon have forgotten that death-bed.”

“ You do both your mother and myself less than justice, Lady Dornton ; while your exaggerations are absurd and ill-placed. Your life is in perfect safety—would that your reputation were equally secure. But, Madam, you are incapable of self-government ; and must not be abandoned

to your own imprudent, not to say vicious, tendencies. Far from seeking to revenge upon you the insults to which we have both been subjected by your intemperate inferences, we are anxious to secure to you an opportunity of redeeming the past. I shall accompany you to the country, where you will have leisure to reflect, to become rational, and to acquire certain qualities and virtues in which you are at present most unhappily deficient."

"I will appeal to Lord Otterford;" I exclaimed with vehemence; "he will never sanction such unheard-of violence."

"Lord Otterford!" echoed Dornton in a tone of pained reproach; "have you indeed the pretension to seek a champion in the man whom you have so deeply injured? In your victim of this morning?"

The blood curdled at my heart. Bitterly did I at that moment repent my treachery, but it was too late. I felt that I had indeed no longer a right to claim his support or kindness.

"Make no resistance;" pursued Sir James coldly; "for it will be useless. Even the world will no longer uphold you, for that world has seen you slighted where all seek to please; and I will have no more public jests at my expense."

My mental re-action was frightful. I could

scarcely comprehend my own identity. Ten hours before I had been occupied only by dreams of triumph and of pleasure; idolized by the world, by the man I loved, by the gay flutterers about me; rich in the world's gifts of wealth, and youth, and fashion, I could have defied fate to overthrow the trophies of my vanity: but in an instant all these gorgeous visions had disappeared, and I saw before me only a compelled and comfortless exile: cheerless isolation, and endless humiliations. I shrank from the hateful prospect: but all my firmness was gone. I uttered one long piercing scream, and fainted.

Dornton rang for my attendants, even assisted in removing my jewels and head-dress, and then, when I had partially recovered from the swoon, offered me his arm to reach my own room. My first impulse was to refuse his support, but as I found myself too weak to dispense with assistance, I was compelled to accept the courtesy. No word was exchanged between us until we reached the door, when he said as calmly as though we had been about to spend the evening in the adjoining street:

“In an hour precisely, Lady Dornton, I will again be here to conduct you to the carriage. Your woman, has, I believe, made all the necessary arrangements; and you have only to

rest yourself, and endeavour to regain your strength."

I made no reply, for I was stricken to the very earth. I found, as he had stated, my drawers and wardrobes empty; and was informed by my attendant that their contents were already on the way to Rooksley. A close travelling dress with a bonnet and mantle were spread upon the bed; in short "my home was made unto me desolate."

My first care was to tear off the finery in which I was tricked out, and which seemed to mock my wretchedness. The composure of despair took possession of me, and I put on, one after the other, all the elaborate wraps that had been provided for me by the zealous care of my woman; I remember that I even drew on my gloves, although I was parched with fever, and gasped for air; and then I cast myself into a chair, and remained silent and passive. I neither wept nor thought. My brain burned and throbbed; and I was sick and faint for want of sustenance; but no wish for food grew upon me. I had a mere vague perception of my existence, and nothing more.

At the appointed time Dornton re-appeared, and I instinctively rose as he approached me. Once more my hand rested upon his arm, but this partial support no longer sufficed, and I staggered, and should have fallen, had he not

thrown his other arm about my waist, and bore me up.

My dejection became complete when I saw Dornton and the new attendant whom he had placed about me, follow me into the carriage, and that no friendly face had appeared to shed one ray of comfort over my departure. I had from the first disliked this woman, whom I considered as the agent of his tyranny, and at such a moment the loathing naturally increased. Why had he forced her upon me, in the very carriage? Beyond all doubt in order to avoid finding himself again alone in my society. We soon left the metropolis behind us, and as we not long afterwards stopped to change horses, I imagine that the light of the lanterns which flashed into the carriage, had afforded a melancholy view of my pale and wretched face, for I saw Dornton suddenly start, and he inquired anxiously of the attendant if I had taken any refreshment since my return from court. She had no sooner replied in the negative than he drew from a travelling case a bottle of Malaga and some biscuits, of which coldly but resolutely he compelled me to partake; and then done he drew himself closely into his corner and either slept or affected to do so, until morning.

What a strange combination of inconsistencies does human nature present! I remained

awake throughout the whole of that long night ; but I neither mourned over the past, nor speculated upon the future ; I was buried in marvel as to the real feelings of the weary woman who sat before me.

In prosperity we little heed those who minister to our comforts in a subordinate capacity. All that we care to know of individuals who are so widely separated from ourselves in interest, in habit, in feeling, and in sympathy, is their adroitness in performing their allotted duties ; and we feed our own vanity with the belief that all their faculties are limited to the proper performance of those duties. In misfortune we begin to understand our error, and to comprehend our mutual dependence ; where we find a sympathising auditor, we please ourselves by believing that we have found a friend ; and although I had not yet brought myself to confide in Joséphine, still I was conscious that she was in my secret ; and this very consciousness had already rendered her necessary to me. Nevertheless, while absorbed in pleasure, and meeting Devereux daily, I had been less susceptible of her loss ; but now I felt as if I were at the mercy of a hired spy ; and, inconsistent as it may appear at such a crisis, this fact weighed more heavily upon me than all the rest.

We arrived at last, to my surprise, at Rooksley and I became more calm. I even persuaded myself that Sir James had only endeavoured to alarm me, by shewing the extent of his power as a husband; and, rocked by this pleasant delusion, I retired to bed, and fell into a deep and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XV.

Evening had flung its drapery over my chamber ere I awoke, and even then it was by the cautious opening of a door which led to my servants' apartments. I raised myself upon my elbow, and to my extreme astonishment I saw Susan, my new attendant, stealthily approaching the bed.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" I asked angrily, jealous lest the system which I had apprehended should already have commenced.

"I have awoke your ladyship;" she said humbly; "but I beg you to believe, my lady, that I would not have taken such a liberty, if I had not felt that time might be everything in such a case; and I was afraid that I should not find another opportunity so safe. Sir James is writing in the library, and every one is busy making the house fit for your ladyship; so I thought, my lady, that if I could speak to you at once, you would have

THE CONFESSIONS OF

re leisure to consider what you wished to do, when you knew all."

There was an accent of sincerity in the woman, but this nevertheless, did not suffice to convince me although it served to excite my curiosity. I felt at once astonished and anxious; but I could not make up my mind to ask a single question, for I had no confidence in my mysterious visitor. She saw my mistrust and was evidently wounded.

"What I am about to tell you, Madam," she said steadily, but with constraint; "I heard in London, from the very person to whom Sir James himself told it after seeing your ladyship's mother, about two hours before you returned from court. Perhaps I ought not to repeat it; perhaps even you, my lady, may blame me; I cannot see you so unhappy, whatever you have done, without feeling that it is my duty to do what I can to help you."

She paused for a reply, but I continued utterly silent.

"You are not to remain long here," she resumed, after having vainly attempted to answer; "only till the furniture of the family rooms in Portland Place has been removed, and then you must go to reach Glenfillan Castle, where Sir James will take you, and where he is afterwards to place you in the care of a sister of Lord

Otterford's. I have also, my lady—" and here she burst into tears; "I have also been instructed to watch you, and to give an account of all your doings to Sir James; none of us are to be allowed to leave the grounds; we are all to be prisoners together; and I know beforehand that your ladyship dislikes me, and has no confidence in the duty which I wish to shew you."

As I could discover no competent reason why this woman, who had but recently entered my service, and to whom my bearing had been the very reverse of conciliatory throughout, should bury herself alive in order to assist my husband in his extraordinary proceedings, or betray her trust in order to gain my favour, I resolved to be prudent, and not to fall into a snare which I considered clumsy enough, when I remembered that so able an artist in dissimulation as Sir James had been its originator. The instinct of self-preservation for once taught me prudence, and my suspicions continued in full force.

"Your ladyship still doubts me;" said Susan, after a second pause which remained equally unbroken by any response on my part; "and may perhaps neglect an useful warning because it reaches you through my means. There is only one way of removing your suspicions of my honest meaning, my lady; and with your lady-

ship's permission I will own to you my reasons for serving you in this difficulty with more zeal than I might, perhaps, otherwise have done."

"Speak, Susan;" I said, "tell me the truth frankly; I shall be at no loss to discover in how far I may trust to the sincerity of your words."

"I have a lover, Madam; a worthy young man; but we are too poor to marry; and, I have no hope save in the generosity of your ladyship, that I shall ever be able to save enough honestly, to bring us together. I accepted the offer of Sir James without reflecting that his gold had been paid for deceit and treachery; but when I came to think of this, I knew that money so dishonestly gained would never prosper, and might be the ruin of us both. That is the real truth, my lady; and your ladyship sees that I do not pretend to feel an attachment to your person which cannot be expected to have grown up in the few weeks that I have been about you."

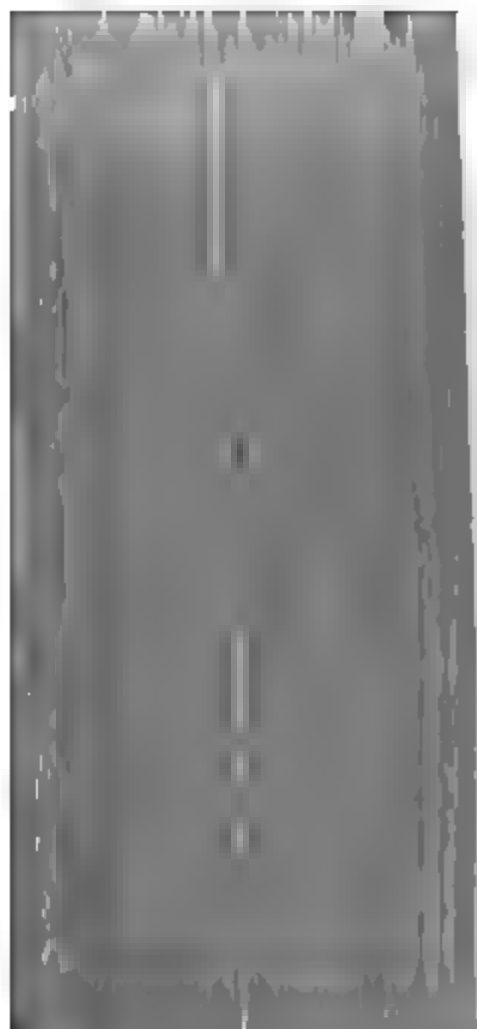
"I believe you, Susan, I believe you; for you have, indeed, made a great moral effort to be honest;" I exclaimed, as I extended my hand to the now weeping woman. Yes, I, the haughty daughter of Lady Madelaine Otterford, actually, for the first time in my life, extended my hand to a menial.

Oh! adversity is a bitter-sweet—
 a mighty moral teacher—how I regret that I do not
 appreciate kindness and its disinterested friends when
 we had opportunity only to suspect hostility.
 It is, indeed, as the great poet of the world has
 said, the jewel struck out of the diamond and
 venom of the heart. Fine friends fall away—the
 dust of the beauty's wings is swept off by the
 cold touch of this same adversity.—and it is then,
 and only then, that we turn to simple, pure, and
 honest human hearts for comfort. Happy they,
 who even thus tardily, find what they seek.

“What is to be done, Susan?”

“Alas! Madam, I can but obey your wishes.
 Whatever you order shall be done. Only, I
 entreat your ladyship not to mention that I have
 betrayed the secret; or to let any one know that
 I am in your interests.”

I could no longer entertain a doubt of the
 honesty of my new confidante; and the compara-
 tive composure with which I had contemplated a
 temporary retirement at Rooksley, gave way at
 once before the frightful anticipation of Glenthillan
 Castle, and the companionship of Lady Flora. I
 knew that the spot was bleak, barren, and deso-
 late; and that the house itself was no better than
 an ornamented prison; while I remembered with
 no less repugnance that my mother's sister was



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"Consider me, my lady," she pursued, pointing out in the strength of her plain good sense the duty which I owed to my own reputation: "how necessary it is that your Ladyship should not lose a post in writing to some of your friends, to explain your sudden departure from town. So many wicked reports may go abroad, and no one can contradict them without your authority."

"But to whom can I write?" I asked gloomily: "who now cares to interfere in my fate?"

"Will not your ladyship at least undeceive my Lord Otterford? He has always appeared so partial to my lady."

"That is over for ever;" I answered, with a pang so bitter that he was almost revenged: "I have nothing to hope from that quarter."

"Some of your ladyship's relations——"

"I have none. I am now alone in the world."

"But my lady has so many friends."

I laughed in the irony of my heart.

"Poor Susan!" I said; "you little understand the friendship of the world—the give and take system, which always insists upon receiving its equivalent—or you would not talk to me of my friends. No, my good girl, those who prosper in life: who raise themselves by wealthy marriages,

or fortunate chances, have alone the right to boast of their friends; and they are the very first, even while doing so, to forget all the fond and holy memories of the past; and to spurn from their homes and hearts the loved ones of less prosperous times who have been less lucky than themselves, although they may previously have vowed to them an undying affection. Last week I was hemmed in with devoted friends; to-day you stand alone to pay me back duty for avoidance."

"Yet surely, my Lady, among so many——"

"You are right, Susan;" I exclaimed suddenly; "I am not utterly desolate. Bring me my desk and a taper."

I was promptly obeyed, and, seizing a pen, I wrote a long and hurried letter to Devereux. Imprudent as the step actually was, I was nevertheless less blameable in this instance than in many others, for I literally knew not in what direction to turn for help. I detailed to him my forcible removal from town, the threats held out by Dornton, and the intelligence which I had obtained of his subsequent designs; and I implored him to take steps to rescue me from both the public and private injustice with which I was threatened.

When I had sealed and directed my letter, I

placed it in the hand of Susan, who had already undertaken to secure its safe transmission to the post; but when her eye fell upon the superscription, I saw her redden and appear irresolute.

"Has your courage failed you so soon?" I demanded abruptly.

"Your ladyship mistakes me. It is only that I am fearful lest in forwarding this letter I may do mischief instead of good. Oh, my lady, I would humbly beg of you to write to any one rather than to Colonel Devereux."

"You forget yourself;" I said haughtily, "I am the best judge of the eligibility of my correspondents."

"But should Sir James ever discover——"

"I do not acknowledge the authority of Sir James Dornton. The advantage which he has now obtained over me has been the mere triumph of brute force."

"But I was so particularly warned, my lady, against——"

"I do not doubt it. Your employer was unable to appreciate the noble qualities of Colonel Devereux, and therefore feared him; but I, who know him better, do him more justice."

"I will yet be bold enough to venture one word, my lady;" persisted the anxious woman; "let me entreat your ladyship not to encourage



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Dornton, as though, touched by my submission, he upbraided himself for the treachery which he was still meditating against me ; but I never ascertained the correctness of my conjectures, for his self-possession soon returned, and with it all his accustomed coldness.

In as short a period as it was possible for me to receive an acknowledgment of my letter to Devereux, and before my anxiety had yet attained to its height, Susan one day put into my hands a small piece of folded paper, evidently torn from some pocket tablets, and upon which were written the three words "I am here," without date or signature ; but the characters were too familiar to me to need interpretation. It was the reply of Devereux.

"From whom got you this ?" I asked eagerly.

"From the Colonel himself, my lady."

"Where is he ?"

"At the Wood Lodge, my lady."

"When did he arrive ?"

"Last night, my lady."

My bonnet and shawl were on in a moment. It was the first time that I had left the house since my arrival at Rooksley ; and memories of the past came thronging before me as I advanced along the well-remembered path, under a clear spring sun, and with a sharp air playing upon my

ce. What had I not seen and suffered since I
first met Devereux beside the same spot. Had I
been true to myself and to him that day, what
trials might have been spared to us both!

When I reached the lodge, I hesitated for a
moment to raise the latch, for I had encountered
no one on my way; and while I yet paused, the
door softly opened, and Devereux stood before
me.

"Fear nothing, Lady Dornton;" he said as he
took my hand, and led me across the threshold,
carefully closing the door behind us. "The
lodge is still uninhabited during the day, and the
gamekeeper, who occupies it at night, has ceded
his right to me for a season. And now, tell me,
what your melancholy position exacts of the most
devoted of your friends."

"Alas, Devereux;" I sighed, as I sank upon a
low bench beside the rude oaken table; "I know
not. Will you not think for me, and counsel
me?"

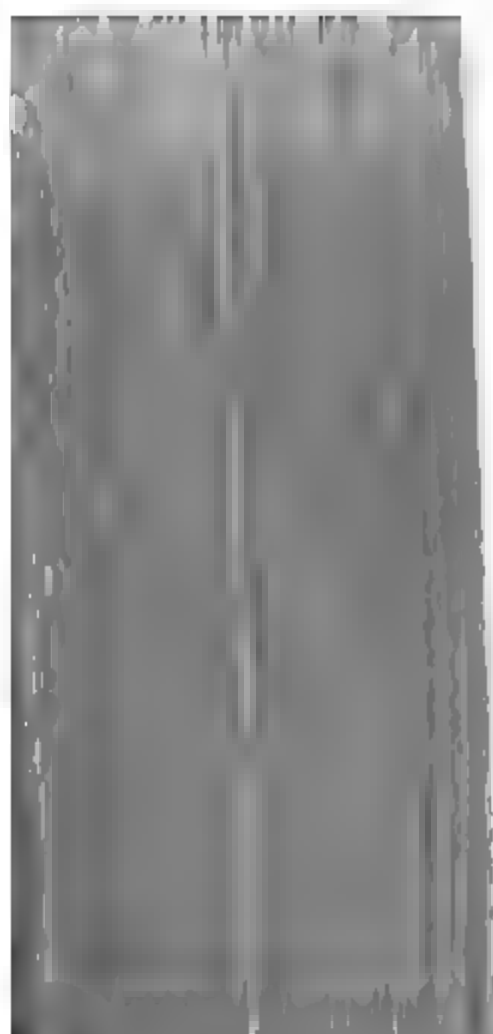
"I am so interested a party—" he murmured
as he folded my hand between his own.

"I have been outraged and insulted;" I
said with bitterness; "the very sight of Sir Jam
odious to me; had he conveyed me here, and
returned to town without any further intrusion
my privacy, I should perhaps have re-

passive, at all events for a time ; but such is not his pleasure ; he is still an inmate of Rooksley, and will remain here, until he departs for Glenfillan, once more in the character of my jailer. Then, indeed, I find that he is to leave me to the enjoyment of my prison, and the guardianship of my mother's sister. My only hope now is, that my despair may soon lay me beside Adela."

"This journey must not take place ;" said Devereux, as he carried my fingers to his lips. "We can hope nothing from Lady Madelaine ; nothing from my uncle. They are both exasperated against you ; and equally violent against each other. Your mother has left town, and retired to her Putney villa, whence she emerges, however, almost nightly, to join the gay societies of the season ; while Otterford remains *perdu* in the square, refusing to receive even his most intimate friends. Something terrible has occurred between them."

"I can understand the cause of their coldness ;" I said sadly ; "and now, when it is too late, I regret that it has been in a great degree, if not entirely, my own work. Devereux, when we first loved each other, your uncle bitterly offended me, and I then, girl as I was, vowed that I would one day be revenged. Subsequently, however, I forgave, even if I did not quite forget the injury ;



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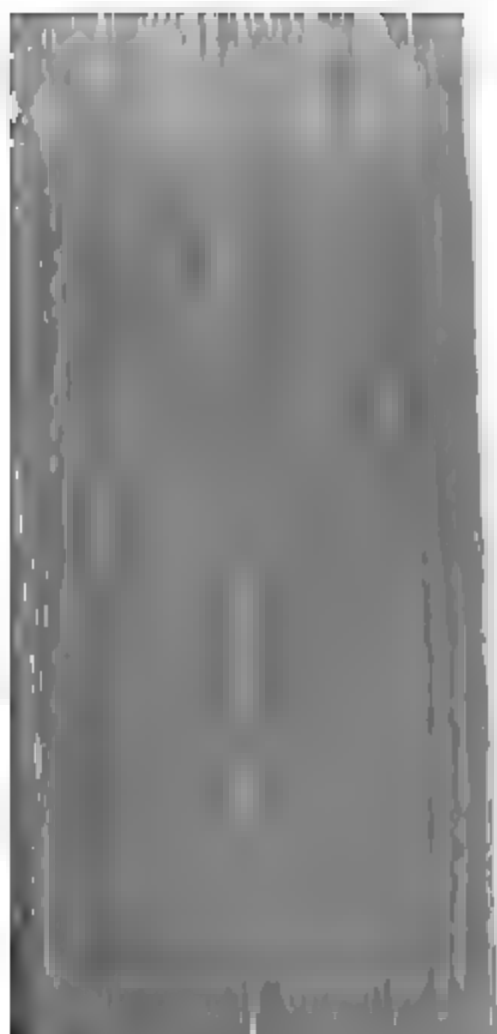
"It has chanced at-
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"I am as ignorant as
I believe," I added, "and
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and my affection is met only by coldness and reproof. Is this consistent? Is this reasonable? Above all, is this generous? Nay, listen to me;" he added, as I strove faintly to disengage my hand; "the moment is at length come in which it behoves me to be frank. Your name is blighted, and your fair fame sullied; you are abandoned by your mother; insulted by your husband; and denied by your acquaintance. You alone know your own heart, unless indeed you will admit me into a participation of that knowledge. You alone know that you are guiltless of those errors of which you are accused, and of which many of your accusers are themselves far from free—and what avails that knowledge, when you cannot obtain credence of the fact? The woman who is merely suspected is always lost; and it is only she who has moral courage to brave the world, and to do justice to herself, who escapes scathless."

"Spare me—spare me," I faltered amid my sobs.

"Eveleen, dear Eveleen, hear me out;" whispered my companion, as he seated himself beside me, and encircled my sinking figure with his arm; "I must shew you precisely the nature of your position, in order that you may summon resolution to resist your fate. You have now seen what you have to expect from that world of which you



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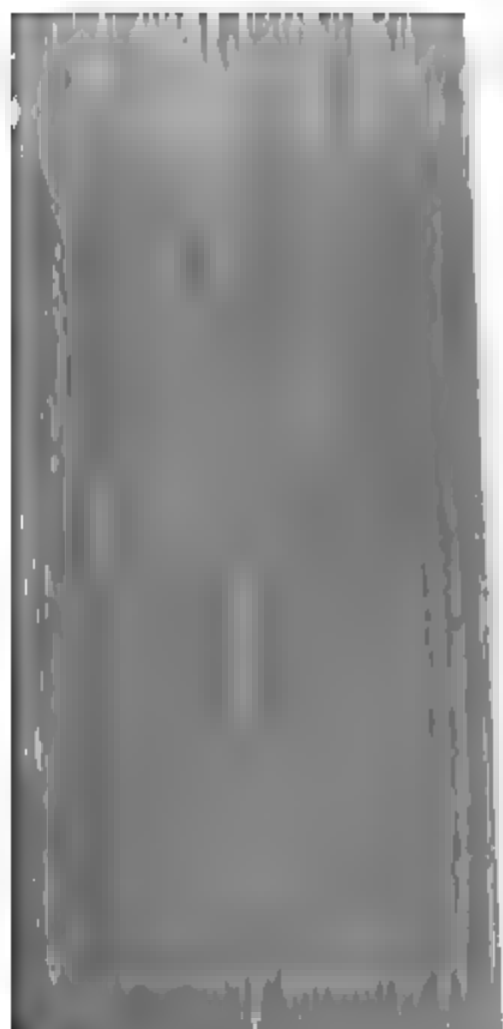
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of faith ; while it is still more impossible that you should be carried to Scotland, almost beyond the reach of efficient help."

"Alas ! alas ! what then is left to me ?" I exclaimed, wringing my hands in agony and indecision.

"The whole world ;" murmured Devereux, in my ear ; "The whole world, fairest and most beloved of women ! The sunny skies, and smiling groves of Italy—the glorious mountain-paths of Switzerland—the classic shores of Greece—and every where, one loyal and loving heart, on which to pillow all your past trials and present happiness."

I was stunned. I might have expected this ; I fear that I *had* expected it ; but vaguely, and as a far-off vision seen dimly in perspective. I was too feeble to contend with the emotion of such a moment ; and suffering my head to fall upon the shoulder of Devereux, I closed my eyes, and fainted.



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your acts. We shall be happy, Eveleen; most happy. We will blot England from the map of our world of love; and we shall still have space enough in which to breathe out our vows of never-changing tenderness and fidelity. I will be to you a friend, a brother, a lover, everything—”

“Save a husband—” I interposed, with an involuntary shudder.

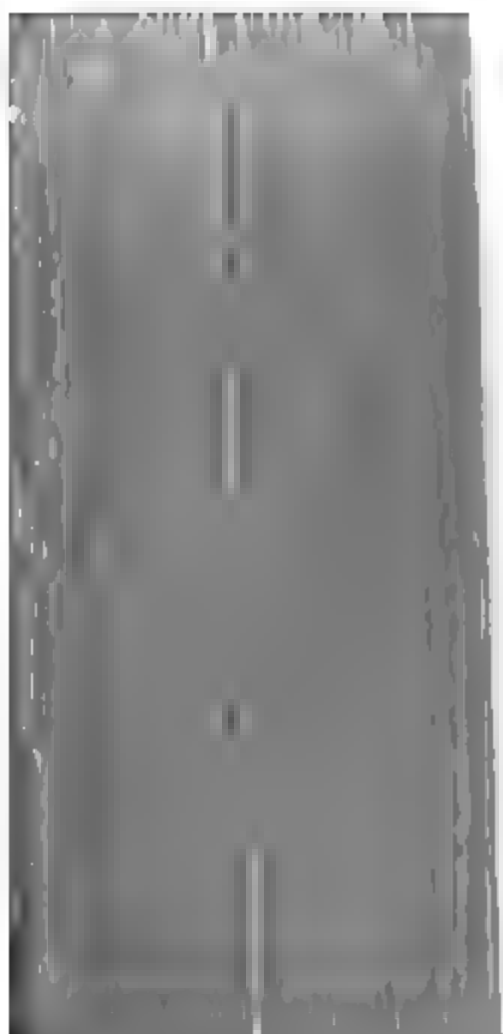
Devereux started, but he almost instantly recovered his composure; “And even that will come, fair trembler;” he said, as for the first time he dared to press his lips to mine, and to do so unchidden; for his words had awakened all the warmth and confidence of my nature; “Do you imagine that Dornton will suffer so plausible an opportunity to escape of enriching himself at your expense, and of freeing you from the odious ties which now subject you to his control?”

“Oh, speak not of it;” I exclaimed piteously: “think only of the humiliation—of the disgrace.”

“Eveleen, remember the commencement of our conversation; and do not distress yourself unnecessarily.”

“True;” I muttered through my clenched teeth; “I am already humbled—already disgraced.”

“If you see fit to accept such a destiny;” said Devereux soothingly; “but if you determine otherwise, your fate is in your own hands. Few



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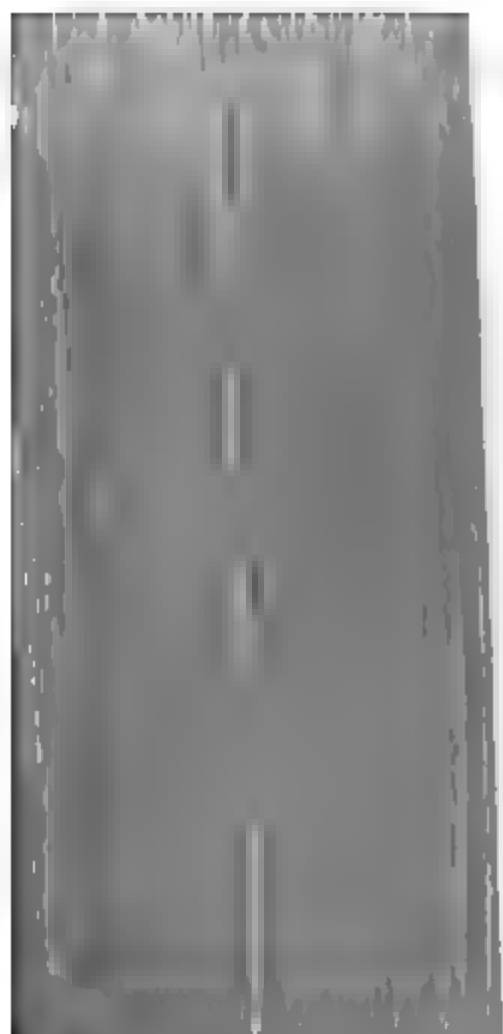
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terminate the present interview; and I was surprised, and I fear somewhat piqued, at the ready acquiescence of Devereux.

“It behoves us to be prudent, dearest;” he said, as he also rose; “and the rather as I shall constantly be near you, to guard you from the harshness of Sir James. From sunrise to sunset you will find me here, until it is your pleasure that I should depart—the happiest of men, or the most miserable. Glance into the next apartment, and you will see that my establishment is complete.”

I followed him to a small door which opened in the opposite wall, and to my astonishment, discovered in the room to which he alluded, a stout horse ready saddled and bridled, and whose rein was made fast to a ring beside a second door which opened into the high road.

“You see I have been wary;” he remarked with a smile; “and have secured a means of instant escape should I run any risk of detection by Dornton or his spies. I need not expatiate, I trust, upon the still more happy use to which this fortunate outlet may be put. I leave it to your own old memories and present attachments. And now, farewell, dear Eveleen. I shall only weary in my solitude for your return, for the interval will be shortened by the visions of the



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It would be idle to attempt an analysis of my feelings when I once more found myself alone. My head and heart were alike in a whirl. I could come to no resolution either for good or evil. At one moment I remembered my blighted reputation, so lightly whispered away in the very circles where I had lately reigned supreme; and I consequently considered myself exonerated from all social obligations, and free to secure my own happiness as I saw fit; in the next I felt almost proud of the martyrdom to which I had been subjected, and resolved not to forego my innate sense of the injustice of which I had been made the victim. But my recent interview with Devereux rose up before me, and tore away the laurels which I had placed so proudly on my brow. I was no longer innocent in heart, and I could not conceal the fact from myself, disguise it as I might. Nor did that evil end here; the tones of tenderness which had fallen upon my spirit like a dew after a long day of drought—the flattering sophistries which had invested vice with a romance at once novel and attractive—the self-appreciation—I dared not call it self-respect—which the devotion of Devereux had re-awakened within me—had all done their dangerous work; and left me powerless to contend against their influence.

I saw nothing but wretchedness on every side.

That of duty, while it promised a comparatively approving conscience, demanded as the price of that boon a period of living death, of mortification, and abandonment; while that of error threatened me with a life-long remorse, but veiled its sufferings with the roses of passion, and the delusion of egotistical gratification. The alternative was a desperate one; and I felt more inclined to mourn over my buried youth and blighted prospects, than over the self-blame which I might incur by an unworthy act. The world had ever been my idol; and it seemed to me more desirable to accept its suffrages upon its own terms, now that I could no longer command them upon mine, than to forego them altogether. The first phase of my difficulty left me utterly without support; in the second I should be upheld and guarded by the proved affection of the man I loved: and I accordingly found a thousand sophistries in its favour, which influenced even if they did not convince me.

Had I consulted my own real interest I should at that moment have hurried to the presence of Lady O'Halloran; have confided to her all the details of my position, have confessed to her, even upon my knees, my moral guilt, and have besought her to protect me against myself; but at the instant when my thoughts

turned to her firm and healthful friendship, at that same moment my memory also placed before me, the pure and holy image of her son's wife ; and, although alone and unseen, I bowed my head upon my bosom with a burning blush ! No, no—I could not bend my haughty spirit to such a degradation—I could not myself offer to her the weapon which was to drain my life-blood. Better the long disgrace, far away from all who had watched over my youth, and foretold for me a brighter and a more fitting fate, than such an hour of wringing penance as that interview must bring with it.

I was too much enervated by vanity and frivolity, to be capable of such a triumph over my own pride ; and thus I voluntarily thrust from me the last fragment of the floating raft which might have saved my honour from shipwreck. In my agony of heart, as I did this, I flung myself wildly upon my knees, and tried to pray. Vain and idle mockery ! What right had I to hope for help and strength when I, at the same moment, voluntarily rejected the one chance still offered to my own exertions ? And what knew I of praying as hearts must pray which amid the fervour of their silence, would be heard ? What knew I of the spontaneous and relying faith of the bruised spirit, which turns to heaven, as the night-mariner to

the beacon light which is his only hope of safety? Nothing; less than nothing—and thus, in this bitter hour, when my vices wrestled with all of pure and precious that yet remained in my fallen nature, I could not frame one petition in which I was not conscious of my own hypocrisy.


I started up self-condemned; the words which had sprung to my lips appeared to echo in my ears like sounds of mockery: my supplications were not pure enough to ascend to Heaven, but were beaten back in rebuke upon me; and I felt that they were rejected. The fire upon the altar of my heart was an unholy fire, and could not ascend; the sacrifice of my burnt-offering had no sweet savour, and the tears which fell upon it turned its juices to bitterness.

I passed a fearful night: it appeared interminable; and yet I dreaded the dawn, for I knew that with the sunrise Devereux would once more be near me, and my moral struggle be renewed. As I at length saw the cold, blank light, stealing along the sky, a new vision, one which had never before risen clearly on my mind, presented itself with terrible distinctness: it was that of a cessation of the love for which I might have bartered my best hopes on earth.

It was a frightful fancy! and coming as it did at that peculiarly depressing moment when the

earth has not yet succeeded in freeing her bosom from the winding-sheet of night, I was keenly susceptible of its influence. All around me looked dreary, desolate, and cheerless, as my own fate must be at such a crisis—and I remembered that although the first sun-burst would renovate and revivify the objects upon which I looked, there could be no after spirit-dawn for me. In the impulse of the moment I drew my night-lamp from the vase which veiled its light; and seizing a pen, I poured forth the anguish of my heart to Devereux.

“ We must meet no more. You should not wish it—and I dare not. We are both wretched: let us accept our fate. We need not therefore be guilty also. I have tried to think, but my brain burns and my eyeballs throb, and I have no power over my intellect—I have tried to pray, but I am ignorant how those pray who are heard. I could bear the world’s rebuke for your sake—I *have* borne it—I could sin to secure your love—I have even meditated to do so. But how? Would my sin indeed secure your lasting and unchanging love? A few brief months of passion you would, no doubt, offer me in requital—probably you would also suppose that nothing could ever weaken or alienate it. Yes, you would believe this, for your nature is loyal and honourable,



nour enable you to
after I had sinned ;
come, tardily perhaps
when you would come
and abandon me
You must one day be
least more worthy
pay back your affection
—and when that
fate ?

“ I know all this ; and therefore
time in my life,
without one respite
false faith—there
until I have seen
more fitting than
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and a better way

my pen, and burying my face upon my folded arms, I again abandoned myself to a train of struggling and miserable thoughts. Gradually, as I remained in this position, my ideas became more vague, my reflections more disjointed; weariness alike of body and of spirit did its tardy work, and I slept.

My dreams were such as might have visited the pillow of an opium-eater—I saw skulls with bridal wreaths upon their heads; and skeleton hands stretching towards me a bony finger encircled by a marriage-ring. I wandered in a vast forest of leafless trees, where the distorted branches seemed to writhe in mockery as I passed along. I stood near a bier; my sister lay there in her shroud, and when I stopped beside her, she stretched out her bony arm, and as it moved along, it traced upon the wall of the charnel-house the name of Dornton, in characters of blood. I saw the grave of Emily; her long fair hair had burst through the humid soil, and was scattered over the turf, and playing in the night-wind; and suddenly Mrs. Delamaine was there also, trampling in the pride of her haughty beauty upon those long fair tresses, while her eyes darted flashes which withered the grass and leaves upon which they fell. More, much more, and all horrible, filled up the measure of that fearful sleep; but at last, all passed away, and I fell into a state of deep and

unbroken forgetfulness. I was aroused by a light touch upon my shoulder, and raising my heavy eyes, I saw Susan standing beside me, and wiping away her tears.

"Why did you awaken me?" I asked sadly; "I was happy; I was unconscious that I lived."

"My poor dear lady! And you have never been to bed. Now, too, when you require all your strength."

"I have still strength enough to suffer, my good girl."

"But I bring your ladyship unwelcome tidings."

"When do we leave Rooksley?" I asked hoarsely.

"The day after to-morrow, my lady: Anderson has received his orders to go this morning to the post-town to bespeak the horses; and I have been warned to pack your ladyship's wardrobe."

I passed my fingers through my tangled hair, and looked helplessly about me. Thick sobs rose in my throat, and threatened me with suffocation; at length, with some difficulty, I swallowed a draught of water at the entreaty of my alarmed attendant, and gradually became more calm. Suddenly my eye fell upon the letter which still lay before me; and once more catching up the pen, I wrote:

"The bolt has fallen. The day after to-mor-

row I depart for my exile ; and now, Devereux, now that our hours are numbered, I feel that I *must* see you once more. Not to-day—for to-day I should betray both you and myself—but to-morrow—to-morrow—Devereux, and for the last time.”

Having added these hurried lines, I sealed the letter, and entrusted it to Susan, with express injunctions to convey it secretly to the Wood Lodge before sunset ; I had for a moment the intention of writing to my mother, to expostulate with her on the violence to which I was subjected, and her own utter abandonment, but I soon rejected the idea. I had brought grief and dissension to her hearth, and I knew her too well to anticipate that she would ever forgive so deep an injury. Thus then, save as regarded Devereux, I was already totally separated from the world ; I was about to follow my sister to the retreat which she had only exchanged for a grave. How knew I but such might be my own case ? At that moment I hoped that we might ere long lie side by side ; and mingle our dust in death, as in life we had never blent our hearts.

CHAPTER XVII.

At an early hour in the morning, trembling with agitation, I threw on a shawl and bonnet, and turned my steps towards the Wood Lodge. I had been careful to ascertain that Sir James had left the house some time previously, as he was in the constant habit of doing, with his gun and his dogs; and as I proceeded along my solitary path, I read myself a serious lesson of prudence and self-government, which I believed that I should not fail to require. A bright spring sun shimmered on the leaves of the trees, and formed chequered mosaics of light and shadow upon the earth. The sky-lark was making the blue heavens ring with its matin song, as it quivered above my head; all about me was calm and beautiful; all within me was dark and troubled. I felt as though I were rushing upon my fate, even while I murmured that I would be true to myself, and conquer the weak-

ness to which it would be sin to yield. As I left the house further behind me, I quickened my pace ; and, at length, with a beating heart and a pale cheek, I stood before the little building, but no ready hand raised the latch to give me entrance ; no anxious eye had watched for my approach, that my greeting might be hastened. All was still.

After a painful pause, unbroken by any sign or sound of human neighbourhood, I summoned courage to throw back the door, but the cottage-rooms were empty.

“ He has been detained ;” I murmured to myself, as I took my place upon the narrow bench, and prepared to await him : “ He has been detained, but he will be here ere long.” And I felt a strange pleasure as I sat in the narrow and unfurnished chamber where Devereux had, for my sake, passed so many solitary hours ; and sighed that the white-washed walls could not betray to me the secret of his thoughts during his weary watch. Memories of what had already passed in that hovel rose up before me ; memories which, at such a moment, I should have stifled, and which only served to increase my passion, and to deepen my regrets ; gradually I felt my better resolutions giving way, and my anxiety for the arrival of Devereux becoming

greater and more difficult to suppress. If he came not on this occasion, I should see him no more; and I had so much to say, so much to ask. But I heard the clock of the little village school-house, which my mother had built in the first year of her marriage with my poor father, strike nine; and still I sat there alone. The sound had conjured up, however, more healthy recollections; and I recalled the image of that father too little loved, and too early lost, until I asked myself, what—should his shade be hovering near me at that moment, disturbed in its repose by the imprudence of his child—what must be its agony and its despair! I could not bear the harrowing reflection, and starting from my seat, I rushed from the lodge and hurriedly returned home, pursued by the piteous howling of a dog, which smote at my heart with its dismal and ill-timed discord.

All was then over; I should see him no more, probably for long years, possibly for life. My fate was sealed; and he—even he—had also deserted me. I paced my chamber in despair; I wrung my hands in agony; I vowed myself to an early death, and loathed the very light that glared upon my wretchedness. Another hour pealed from the low belfry: I counted every stroke tenaciously, as though my destiny hung

upon its clear and ringing voice; and then I listened anxiously for other sounds, for I was oppressed by the deep stillness which succeeded. It was soon broken once more. From afar-off, yet as it seemed, slowly approaching nearer to the house, I heard again the long howling wails of the dog which had disturbed me as I left the cottage. The melancholy cadence of those howls made me shudder. I was then to be surrounded to the last with gloom and misery! A cold damp started to my brow, and I sank into a seat, for my limbs trembled. Suddenly the wail ceased, and I heard a strange movement in the house; cries of alarm and horror, confused voices, and steps hastily approaching my chamber. I grasped the arms of the chair in which I sat, and half raised myself, as if to meet with less delay the new trial which was awaiting me, be it what it might.

A heavy hand beat rudely upon my door. I answered hoarsely to the summons; and immediately the valet of my husband stood before me, with a blanched brow, and trembling lips. For an instant he was speechless, but at length he gasped out: "All is over, my lady;—there is no longer a hope—they have brought him home, but he is dead. My poor, poor, murdered master!"

"Dead !" I repeated, like one who dreams ;
"Who is dead ? Who has been murdered ?"

"My master—my poor master !" again exclaimed the man.

I heard no more. A heavy blow appeared to have descended on my head, and I fell senseless to the earth.

Susan was standing beside my bed when I again opened my eyes ; for a time I could not sufficiently recover my scattered senses to comprehend what had occurred ; but gradually a confused memory grew upon me, although still so vaguely, that I clung to the hope that I had been visited by a sleeping vision which had bewildered my imagination.

"I have had a frightful dream ;" I whispered shudderingly.

"My lady has not slept ;" sobbed out the weeping woman.

"Not slept !" I exclaimed, lifting my heavy head from the pillow ; "can it indeed be really so ? Sir James——"

"Is no more, Madam."

"Dead !" I almost shrieked ; "and where is Colonel Devereux ?"

"I can understand my lady's suspicion. but——"

"The word *murder* seems to ring in my ears, as though some demon had uttered it.—Tell me

how my husband met his death ; and tell me the truth :” I added,—“frightful as it may be, I must know the truth : this is no moment for false refinements, or mysteries which have in them more of anguish than of mercy—tell me ~~who~~ murdered him.”

“Indeed, my lady—”

“Peace, girl !” I said wildly : “I know it all. He was not there when I went to seek him. I waited there alone—alone, till the spirit of my father drove me forth ; and I was pursued even to my chamber by the voice of the wailing brute who was howling out his requiem over the dead. Susan ;” and I clutched her arm with my convulsed fingers ; “I am innocent—you know that I am innocent !”

“My poor dear lady, you will break my heart.”

“You warned me that there would be bloodshed, Susan ; but I did not heed you. Mad with terror and despair, I thought only of myself,—and yet I had been warned—I had been warned——”

“I do beseech you to listen to me, my lady ; indeed, and indeed——”

“Where did they meet ? Did *the murderer* escape ? Did your master curse me before he died ?”

“Unless your ladyship will calm yourself, and let me speak ;” said Susan firmly ; “it is in vain

for me to hope to comfort you. There is a great deal to be done, and it must be done by you, my lady——”

“ Alas ! alas ! what will become of us !” I exclaimed, writhing like one in the agonies of death.

“ Rely upon it that your ladyship does Colonel Devereux injustice ;” persisted Susan ; “ from all that I can learn, the death of Sir James was caused by an accident for which no one is responsible.”

“ An accident ? can it really be ? Who told you that it was an accident. Who saw it ? How did it occur ?”

“ I do not yet know the exact particulars, my lady. Hearing a great noise in the park, and the howling of a dog that I knew at once by his voice must be one of my master’s pointers, I ran to a short distance from the house, fearing I did not well know what, when I saw, my lady——I saw the bleeding body of Sir James, which two peasants were carrying in their arms. I had my own fears, I will not deny it ; and in my terror I began to question these men ; but, full of anxiety about Sir James, they answered me shortly : ‘ He did it himself—he did it himself—he was killed by his own gun.’ I came back with them to the house, and walked close beside my

master's head, in the hope that I might see some sign of life, but I watched in vain ; the blood had stopped—and—and—in short, my lady, I was assisting to remove Sir James to his own room, when his valet came running to tell me that your Ladyship had fainted ; and I know no more."

I listened with panting eagerness ; but the hope which had for an instant pierced through my agony, once more abandoned me as Susan proceeded with her narrative. I knew too well the position in which I stood both to my husband and Colonel Devereux, and the feelings which they mutually entertained towards each other, to venture to lean upon so slight a reed as the one now tendered to me ; and this knowledge, combined with the imperfect information of my attendant, rather served to deepen than to decrease the awful suspicion which was gnawing at my heart. Moreover, Devereux had not appeared at the Lodge, although I had apprised him that I would be there to see him for the last time. Could I now doubt what it was that led him to neglect that meeting ? At what a moment, too, had the catastrophe occurred ? Just as I was about to be subjected to the last indignity with which the authority of a husband enabled Sir James to visit me. Was not all then fearfully and fatally clear ?

In this emergency I felt all the ardour of my love

for Devereux ; for I forgot the dead man who lay stark in his stiffening blood within a few chambers of my own ; I forgot the horror, and perhaps it might be also, the peril, of my own situation, to shudder at the danger which impended over him. He, the guilty one ! against whom a cry had gone up to heaven. Would he escape out of the country ? And, if so, whither would he turn his wandering steps ? Friendless, homeless, and an exile, with the stain of blood upon his heart, and the brand of Cain upon his brow—he, who had been a spoiled child of the same world, which had also abandoned me. And he had become its outcast for my sake—he had paid this bitter price for my love—and that love must now be denied to him for ever. The serpents of the Laocoon were not more crushing or more deadly, than the insidious and snake-like sophistries which rose tumultuously within me, and writhed and grappled at my heart ; but I shuddered as I spurned them back, and resolutely bent my thoughts upon my own probable destiny.

Susan had left me at my desire to obtain more full and feasible information of the tragedy which had been enacted almost under my very eyes ; and I was still lost in a sea of wild conjecture, when she returned, with an expression of countenance that almost reassured me.

“ I have not misled your ladyship,” she said, so soon as she had closed the door behind her; “ every one tells the same story. The peasants who brought my master home were working in a field about half a mile from here, and saw him leave the open park, and beat the small wood near the road-side; after which he jumped out upon the pathway, and walked slowly along, with his gun upon his shoulder, and his head bent down, as if he was full of thought. A groom had been sent some days ago to London by Sir James, and just as he nearly reached the Lodge, (which your ladyship knows stands at a turn of the little wood), he rode up, and gave Sir James a letter. The underwood and weeds are thick there; and my master, having rested the butt-end of his gun on the ground, leant upon the barrel while he read his letter; and he was still doing this when another horseman approached him, riding very rapidly. At the sound of his horse’s feet, Sir James looked up, and as though he knew him, made him a sign to stop; folded his letter, and hastily lifted his gun, without remarking that it was entangled among the long weeds and brambles; the jerk which he gave to draw it out, brought the trigger in contact with some weed or twig; it went off; and you know the rest, my lady—my poor master was killed on the spot.”

“ Is this true, Susan ?”

“ They all swear to it, groom, and peasants, and all, my lady.”

“ And the horseman ?”

“ Fortunately, your ladyship, it was Jacob the new stableman, that Sir James sent to London, and he had never seen the Colonel. All that he could say, therefore, was that the strange gentleman was muffled up about the chin, wore a large cloak, and rode a grey horse.”

“ Are you sure that he said a grey horse ?”

“ Positive, my lady ; and besides, the farming men remembered seeing both the horse and the man pass by towards Rooksley for the last two mornings ; only they said that to-day he was later than usual.”

“ And what did he when he saw Sir James fall ?”

“ He jumped off his horse, my lady, and lifted up my poor master, and felt his heart ; and then he shook his head, and desired the men to carry Sir James carefully up to the house, telling them who he was ; and then, when he saw them about to obey him, he mounted again, and galloped off towards London.”

This intelligence calmed me at once. He was not then a murderer—he was guiltless of my husband’s blood—the very consciousness of this fact

removed its heaviest weight from my heart. But why had he not ridden on to Rooksley, now that there was no impediment to his appearance, and prepared me for the horrible tragedy of the morning?"

I subsequently learnt the cause. The letter which Susan had delivered, and which informed him of my immediate departure for Scotland, coupled with the assurance of my intention to see him on the morrow for the last time, had convinced him that he had not a moment to lose if he would secure a different result. He had, therefore, ridden to the post-town to provide a carriage, which was to take its station a hundred paces from the Wood Lodge at midnight; never doubting that the woman who could risk such an interview at such a moment, would offer but a faint resistance to his passionate entreaties. Yes, that very night, on which the pale and disfigured corpse of my husband lay buried in its everlasting sleep, he had calculated that I should become at once a fugitive and an outcast from my home, and from my country! Even now, I shudder as I remember the precipice upon whose brink I stood; and the awfulness of the means which saved me.

Other arrangements, connected with our anticipated flight, had detained him until so late an

hour, that he was compelled to remain at the post-town all night; and he was on the way to our appointed interview, when he came upon Sir James; whom, from the fact that his face was concealed by the letter upon which he was intent, he had not recognised until he passed close beside him.


Struck by the fatal inferences which might be drawn, should it be discovered that he was an eye-witness to the horrible death of the man he hated, he had no sooner ascertained that all was indeed over, than he galloped back to ——, declared that he found it necessary to hasten his journey, and throwing himself into the carriage which he had already secured, he hurried to town with all the speed which four stout horses could insure.

Earnest to prevent the possibility of my being implicated in the melancholy affair, as he was conscious that I must be if he remained absent from London, he lost not a moment on his arrival in throwing off his travelling-dress, and calling upon my mother; after which' he made a circuit of the clubs, and then returned to his father's house; where, pleading fatigue, he shut himself into his own apartments, in order that he might be alone, when the fatal news, which he was aware must follow him in a few hours, should be promulgated.

This proceeding was too well-judged and too generous to be either guessed at or appreciated by me at such a moment; and my indignation and wretchedness at his neglect and apparent indifference to my misery, helped me to overcome the horror of my position, where sympathy and kindness, however active and insidious, would probably have failed.

Amid all this conflict of distempered feeling, I suddenly remembered the necessity of despatching a messenger in all haste to Lady Madelaine, to inform her of the tragic event which had just occurred; and I had actually seated myself at my writing-table before I became conscious of the extreme difficulty of the task. In what spirit could I address her? If I assumed a tone of grief, she would be well aware of the hypocrisy to which I had condescended; and if I wrote coldly, she would at once accuse me of even more unholy vices. Moreover, I knew not what had become of Devereux. Should he be still in the neighbourhood, and that the fact became known, every sentence that I wrote might, perhaps, be tortured into an accusation which I did not possess the means of rebutting. What was to be done?

Once more Susan came zealously to my aid. "Indeed, my lady," she said beseechingly; "you are not yet able to undertake such a melan-



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dence in town, would alike oblige me to submit in a certain degree to her authority. I could therefore only sigh over the necessity, and submit.

This letter was at once confided to the groom who had witnessed the catastrophe of the morning, with strict injunctions to travel with all speed to town; and to answer the questions which might be put to him, without either reserve or exaggeration; and I made this selection, because I believed that the account given by a person who was on the spot, would suffer less from the cross-questionings of suspicion or ill-will, than that of one who merely repeated what he had heard from others.

This arrangement was scarcely completed when to my surprise I heard the wheels of a carriage pass over the gravel under my window at a rapid pace; and in five minutes afterwards I was clasped in the arms of Lady O'Halloran.

No, never, never, shall I forget the almost painful happiness of that moment. I had still a friend! There was no room for doubt, for I felt the warm tears falling upon my neck.

"Eveleen;" she at length said in an accent of real feeling; "how, in such an awful trial as this, could you forget that I was near you? Were you

not sure of my sympathy and assistance under any circumstances?"

I could only strain her closer to my heart.

"I would not idly inflict another pang upon you, my poor child;" she pursued while she returned the pressure; "but I have a stern duty to perform;" and as she spoke, she drew me towards a sofa, and seated herself beside me. "One question you must answer, and with truth, as you hope for consolation in this world. Eveleen; strange, terrible rumours have reached me; but I will trust your word—Are you innocent?"

"I am—I am"—I exclaimed eagerly, as I cast myself on my knees before her, with clasped hands and streaming eyes: "Innocent, most innocent in act; but guilty, I fear, in heart."

"After this admission I cannot doubt you; guilty or not, my age left me free to offer consolation to your father's child; but hoping that you had been misjudged, I have brought you also another comforter, for you have need of all our tenderness." And replacing me gently upon the sofa, she rang, and desired that her daughter-in-law, who still remained in the carriage, might be requested to join her in my dressing-room.

"And now, calm yourself, Eveleen;" she said; "and find consolation in learning the happiness which your assurance has given me. You know

not how my heart has bled for you, since those horrid doubts were awakened in my mind. Imprudent though you may have been, let your past errors be subject indeed of deep regret, but not of despair. You are still very young; but you have already had opportunity to appreciate the hollowness and falsehood of that world which you loved too well for your own peace; let your past experience be to you as the fire to the gold in the crucible, and you may yet have occasion to be grateful for the trials which awakened you to higher and better hopes."

She had scarcely ceased speaking when the door again opened, and the pure and heavenly eyes of the younger Lady O'Halloran met my own.

"The world has done her injustice, Margaret;" said my kind comforter; "take her to your heart, for the bruised reed must be bound up."

Long and earnest was the embrace which we exchanged; but even amid all my emotion I felt humbled by the striking contrast which we presented. Calm and serene in her almost saint-like beauty, no cloud had gathered upon the radiant brow of that young girl; no trace of passion had marred the purity of her beauty; while I was crushed and withered by the spirit-war which had so long been scorching up my youth.

I was not, however, suffered to dwell long upon so bitter a contemplation, for the watchful old lady as if conscious that a new source of suffering had been opened within me, suddenly exclaimed: "You must allow me, my dear Lady Dornton, to assume at once the authority of an old and sincere friend. You cannot remain under this roof at present; nor are you competent to control the mournful arrangements which must necessarily be made, before either your mother or Lord Otterford can arrive from town; go then at once to the Hall with Margaret; my son is from home, and no one can intrude upon your privacy; I will remain here for a short time, during which your woman can obey any orders which you may wish to give, and then follow you. Meanwhile, Margaret will herself bear you company, and, I trust, afford you comfort."

I could only bless her for the suggestion; and ere long I left the house of death calmer, and more full of hope than I had expected again to be in this world.

A faint sickness crept over me as I passed the chamber of my husband; but I nevertheless approached the door, and would have entered to look upon him for the last time, as though this tardy duty could compensate for my past errors. My intention was, however, instantly negatived

by Lady O'Halloran, who was already aware of the frightful spectacle which would have awaited me ; nor did I attempt to dispute her will.

And thus I once more quitted the home of my childhood, amid silence, and gloom, and terror ; leaving behind no one to regret me, or to sympathize in my early sorrows. All was darkness there ; but still before me rose one distant ray of light. The torch had been ignited by the fair young creature who bore me company, and who had already whispered amid her tears, words of divine consolation which I now heard for the first time, and which seemed to bring peace upon their breath.

CHAPTER XVIII.

I was transported to a new world. I was like the tempest-tossed and shipwrecked mariner, who is suddenly cast ashore upon one of those treasure-teeming islands, where all is fresh, and green, and young, as though it had just sprung into existence; one of those dreamy and delicious solitudes of which distant voyagers bring back tales which are so glowing as to seem almost fabulous. No ill-judged and officious sympathy was forced upon me at moments when I was unable to bear the words of consolation; no retrospect was intruded upon me which could jar one chord of my weary spirits; but in those hours the beautiful young wife, her eyes teeming with a quiet joy which to me was as novel as it was soothing, would come and seat herself beside me, with her infant in her arms, and gradually win me back to composure.

It was a holy picture ; and it awoke my heart to thoughts and feelings hitherto unknown to me. Even such as she was might I have been, had I known how to regulate my passions, and to control my vanity. How fatal had been my mistake !

Day succeeded day in the same unbroken and spirit-healing calm. I knew that Lord Otterford had arrived at Rooksley, and that an official investigation had taken place which had ratified the fact of Sir James's involuntary self-destruction. In announcing to me the refusal of my mother to comply with my request that she should come to me in my grief, the kind-hearted Lady O'Halloran was careful to mitigate the pang which she imagined that her information must necessarily inflict, by also acquainting me with the satisfaction expressed by Lord Otterford at my removal from the house to her generous guardianship, and the request he had ventured that she would continue to afford me her protection until some definite arrangement could be made.

“When all is over ;” she concluded, “he will visit you here, before he again departs for town ; and I would counsel you, my dear Eveleen, to entreat his influence with your mother to receive you under her own roof, at least until the expira-

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“ You have, indeed ; and in that support alone can I trust during the many weary months which await me.”

And she had done so ; gently, but in surprise at my insensibility, she had led me on to entertain a less exalted idea of mere human strength, and human perfectibility ; she had taught me to look into my own heart, and to discover its hollowness ; she had, in short, wakened a new nature within me ; unstable and weak as yet, it is true, but which might perchance prove to be the germ of better things ; and this, too, in the space of one short week, without dogmatism, without dictation, without rebuke ; but simply, earnestly, and fondly ; as a mother might have recalled her wandering child to the yearning heart which panted to receive her back.

No wonder, then, that I deprecated any change in my position ; that I shrank at the idea of the visit which awaited me ; the meeting, which in every point of view, presented a bitter trial. My own mother had spurned my prayer for help ; and it was he whom I had still more deeply injured, who was about to stand before me ; perhaps to rebuke me with my treachery ; perhaps to reproach me with my past errors ; perhaps, too—and this was the most horrible thought of all—perhaps,

THE CONFESSIONS OF

too, to hurl at me suspicions too frightful to be reduced to words!

Nor will any who have followed me through this confession of a wasted life, be surprised to learn that even with the images of this anticipatory trial, now at the very threshold, mingled to the dread of leaving the roof of Lady O'Halloran, from a nearer and dearer consideration than even those which I had educes to herself. I felt that this sojourn in a home where all breathed of purity and peace, must tend to exalt me in the eyes of Devereux. He would see that I was not in truth the outcast he had believed; that the good and the virtuous had not abandoned me utterly—and this consideration was my best consoler.

I dared not repine that I had heard nothing of him since that fateful morning. Ten days! barely elapsed, and the body of Sir James not yet committed to the grave. How could he have ventured to intrude upon me now more than ever anxious to exact from him a breach of that respect which it was true, that, as well aware as myself, he knew that my feeling towards my concession on his part; but still the e-

society must be increased and it my more
more stringently than ever. remembered as I was
by the past.

For the first time I began—~~at~~ from now
when I had not as yet discovered myself in the
morning garments which were presented for me—
to dwell upon that future from which I had
hitherto shrunk. What did I not promise my-
self? For the first time I had begun also to attach
a value to the wealth which would enable Devere-
aux to abandon his imprisonment and to give him-
self up entirely to the life of idleness and peace
which he had so often pictured to me in glowing
colours, too brilliant, alas! for the reach of
• reality.

From these sweet dreams I was started on
the following morning by the aspect of the
funereal dress which was spread out in my dress-
ing-room. I had been prepared to expect it on
the day upon which the obsequies of Sir James
were to be performed: but when I was actually
in presence of this dismal mockery of woe, and
looked into my own heart, it seemed to afford the
most bitter epigram, alike upon the present and
the past; and my blood curdled as I submitted to
its adjustment. My long and luxuriant hair was
strained back, and concealed beneath the close
borders of a muslin cap, which formed a dense

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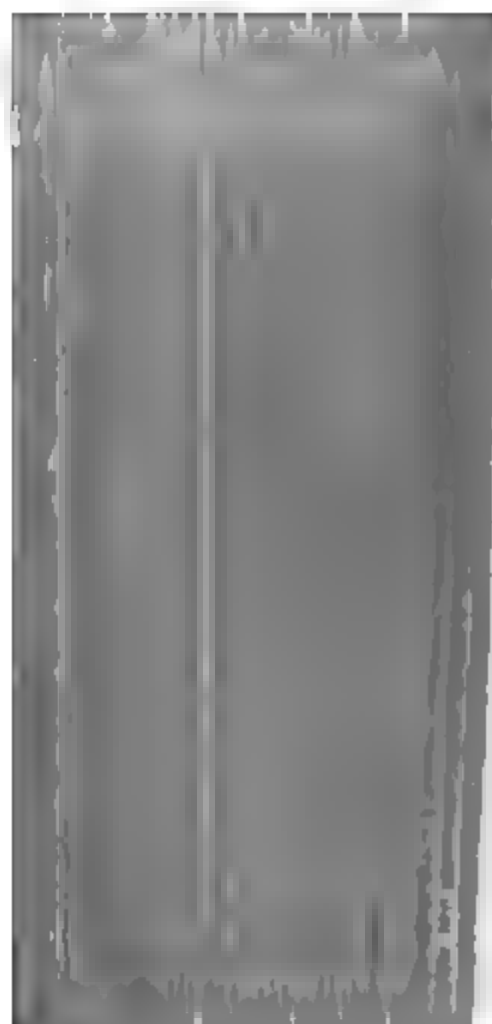
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Little more passed during the meal. I was asking myself if I should indeed fulfil the hope which had just been uttered for me: and my companions were too considerate to intrude upon a silence and a preoccupation, which they felt to be only too consistent with my position. Indifferent, and worse than indifferent, as I had been to Sir James as a wife, I could not, nevertheless, contemplate his untimely fate without a pang, the more bitter because I was conscious that I had probably been its involuntary cause. Had not Devereux appeared before him at that eventful moment, he would, without doubt, have been more guarded in his movements; and was not Devereux even then on his way to the meeting which I had myself appointed?

These were bitter convictions; and as the unconscious tears streamed over my wan cheeks, I ceased to believe myself so guiltless as I had hitherto striven to appear; but then, once more uprose the memory of the cruel cheat which had been practised upon me—the falsehood and tyranny of which I had been made the victim—and I passed from the contemplation of my wrongs, to the prospect of brighter days to come. These were again banished in their turn, by gloomy visions of the house of death, the shrouded corse, and the funereal train, which had



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Meanwhile the

subdue to my will it to despise, had. Like a trodden serpent turned upon me, and stung me in the heel. I had not even a home, no shelter to which calamity could not pursue me : and my one vision of future happiness was still, certain as it seemed, faint, and afar off : and to be realised only after an interval in which I dared not dwell.

Such were the meditations of my first morning of visible widowhood : and when on the conclusion of the repast of which I had been merely a spectator, I again retired to the solitude of my own apartment, the same reflections followed me.

The windows were flung open, and I leant eagerly out to catch the cool wind upon my throbbing brow, as it swept over the leafy stretch of forest-timber before me. Its influence was wholesome. As I gazed out, I clasped my hands in prayer ; when, as if in answer to the appeal, I heard booming upon the wind, slow, measured, and rendered even more solemn by distance, the deep pealing of a death-bell. It needed no interpreter : it was the toll of the village church bell of Rooksley, inviting to the shelter of its vaults the dead for whom I wore those clinging weeds.

Instinctively I fell upon my knees, and still I heard the solemn cadence rolling over hill and

valley, and proclaiming to never-dying Nature the departure of another of her children.

At length it ceased, and I knew that the mourning train had entered the sacred house. Alas! would soon be over; and I shuddered as I remembered with how little waste of time and ceremony that body was in death committed to the earth, which in life had been tended with so much care and gentleness. This must be one day my coffin, the writhing worm—oh, it was, indeed, most horrible, for I had not yet learnt to look beyond these antecedents of another and a more glorious life.

It will easily be foreseen that emotions of this description had humbled my pride, and chastened my spirit, sufficiently to enable me to regard even the tardy and brief visit of Lord Otterford with gratitude, if not with hope.

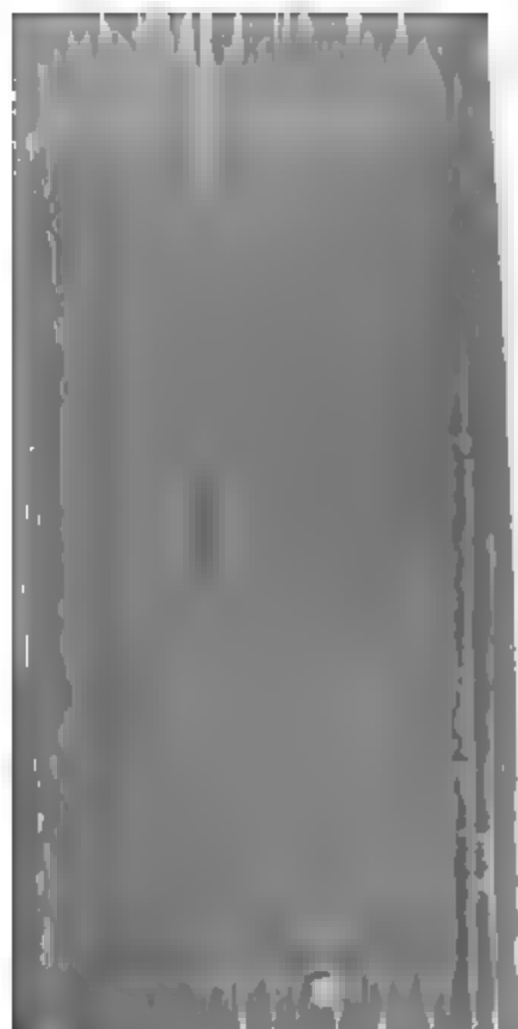
He was to visit me shortly after his return to the funeral, and to set off the same night for— There was, indeed, little to detain him with gloomy and abandoned walls of Rooksley in the near neighbourhood of what had once been the happy home of Emily Vernon.

CHAPTER XIX.

I was yet upon my knees, with my face leaning on my folded arms, when the door of my dressing-room was so softly opened that I was not aware of being seen ; until I heard the low voice of my hostess whisper gently :

“ Here is the mourner. Judge if she has need of your pity and protection.”

I raised my weary head, and with an emotion more acute than I had ever before experienced, I saw Lord Otterford with a pale cheek, but a stern eye, standing before me. Lady O'Halloran had already retired, and was closing the door behind her. As I slowly rose from my knees, I detected that the expression of Lord Otterford's countenance softened, as if involuntarily. The deep and evidently sincere dejection in which he found me had touched him, despite his sense of wrong ; and as he threw himself into a seat, he covered his face with his spread hand.



sink under my shame :

“ Of what avail would
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Eveleen,—as it is, I feel compelled at once to pardon and to pity you.”

I rushed forward, and cast myself at his feet.

“Yes—you do well;” he pursued; “that is the most fitting posture you can assume while listening to what I have to tell. The pride of self dependence and self appreciation have nothing in common with such an hour as this, when the scent of the death-soil is still clinging to my own garments, and the solemn words of the burial-service sounding in my ears; and when the weeds in which you are yourself clad are new and strange to you. I will spare you any unnecessary details for both our sakes; but with certain circumstances it is alike expedient and proper that you should be made acquainted. I need scarcely inform you that Sir James has left no testamentary document of any description, either here or in town. No foreshadowing of his approaching and fearful end had warned him to accomplish this duty; and I was, consequently, from your own silence upon the subject, left free to comply with the injunctions of your mother as to the mode of his interment. And here, Eveleen, I should have bounded my relation with regard to your unfortunate husband, had I found you in a less becoming frame of mind; but, under existing circumstances, I feel compelled to confide to you

one fact, which after you have recovered the first shock of the intelligence, may tend to lessen the compunction which you must naturally experience when you look back upon your conduct as a wife."

I pressed my lips upon his hand, and listened eagerly.

"You may have heard that Sir James had rested the fatal fowling-piece upon the ground in order to read a letter, which he had just received from town by his own messenger; and that he was still engaged in its perusal when the sudden appearance of an individual—Eveleen, I detect your shudder, but I will not, I *dare* not, ask you if you can determine the identity of that individual; for despite all the facts which would seem to negative my suspicion, I am but too painfully convinced of a frightful truth—that letter is now in my possession." He paused. He evidently dreaded the effect of his next words; while I gazed up at him with dry and dilated eyes, and parched and parted lips.

"That letter," he resumed after an instant; "was in reply to one which he had himself written; and it came from—Mrs. Delamaine."

I made no gesture of indignation; I felt none. I only bowed my head once more upon his knees, overwhelmed by a feeling which was half horror

and half relief. Lord Otterford bent over me in wonder, as he whispered: "Do you understand me, Eveleen?"

I made a gesture of assent.

"Do you desire to see that letter?"

"Never!"

"And you are right, poor child! Suffice it then that, although its contents by no means justify your past errors, they nevertheless afford painful evidence that the indignities to which you have been lately subjected, arose less from a desire on the part of your husband to punish your levity and to reform your conduct, than to disembarrass himself of your presence; and this fact, mortifying as it must appear to you, I have considered it my duty not to withhold in justice to both parties. I must also state, although I am aware that upon this point you are careless, that the affairs of Sir James are considerably involved, despite his apparently profuse expenditure; but as nearly all his engagements appear to have been debts contracted at the gaming-table, which may be legally evaded, it is necessary that I should understand if you intend to recognise them."

"To the last penny, my lord."

"Lanticipated no less from your sense of right. And now, Eveleen," he added sadly; "we have

entreated the countess
mother."

"I was, indeed,
Eveleen, you must be
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"Oh, had you
insulting taunts, I

hoarsely, and evidently struggling against some powerful emotion; "that your mother was not the only victim of your treachery—that your words carried with them a venom which distilled a double poison."

Self-convicted and repentant, I dared not seek to justify myself.

"The effect of this fatal error has extended still further;" pursued Lord Otterford, who was at no loss to interpret the humiliation of my silence; "for it has tended to close your mother's heart against you, I fear for ever. My entreaties, for wounded as I was, Eveleen, I could still feel for you, produced no change in her determination; she has refused not only to receive, but even to see you. Her utmost condescension was the expression of her desire that you should, at least during the year of your widowhood, fulfil the intention of Sir James, and reside at Glenfillan, under the protection of her sister."

I gasped for breath. The vision of Adela's death-bed rose before me, with all its appalling accessories; and it was with difficulty that I could support myself.

"Every thing has been already prepared at the Castle for your reception;" he continued; "you will be, in every respect, your own mistress, and secure from all the comments of a censorious

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"My mother sh
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left in ignorance of the feelings and the sympathy of him whose affection had now become the only hope of my existence ! Yet the accent of Lord Otterford was so full of conviction, so earnest, and so persuasive, that I could not resist its influence. I promised what he exacted.

“ Be true to your pledge, Eveleen ;” he said as he bent down, and kissed my forehead ; “ and, should you wish it, I will frequently be your guest. I must at once return to town : your own affairs exact it ; and it will be with a heart relieved from a weight of anxiety on your account, that I shall report your obedience to your mother. I would entreat you, meanwhile, to regulate with Lady O’Halloran, (to whom you owe a heavy debt of gratitude,) the period of your own departure ; that done, acquaint me with your determination, and I will hasten to protect you to your new home. And now, farewell ; give me your hand once more ; let not the promise of this hour, in which I feel a faith which it would indeed pain me to find misplaced, prove fallacious ; and I trust that brighter prospects may open upon us all.”

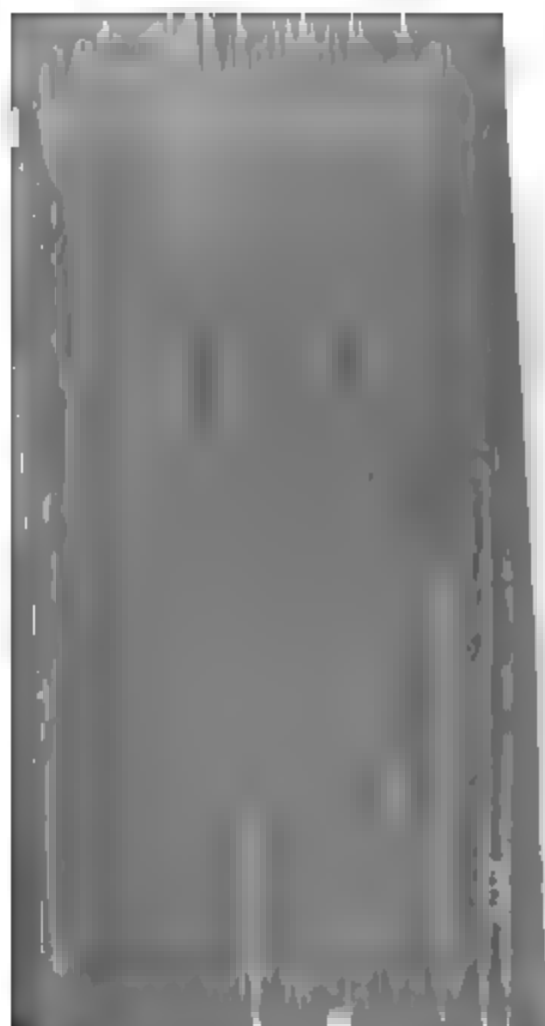
Need I say with what emotion I responded to this unhopèd-for kindness ? I forgot for the moment all save my happiness in being thus restored to the good opinion of my mother’s hus-

hand. I scarcely cared to remember that that mother herself had not vouchsafed to me one word of sympathy or pity; I forgot the exile to which I had pledged myself; my enforced separation from Devereux: the yet unclosed tomb of my husband; I felt only that I might yet regain the esteem of the world, and become an object of affection to those from whom my former faults had, as I once believed, separated me for ever.

CHAPTER XX.

My leave-taking with Lady O'Halloran and her daughter was a most trying one ; when, at the close of a month, I summoned Lord Otterford to perform his promise. I had lately lived in such an atmosphere of affection and peace that I had almost ceased to regret the world and its gaieties ; but my old yearning grew upon me when I contemplated the change to which I was about to be subjected. I repressed the feeling, however ; and strengthened by the approbation of my estimable hostess, I uttered no repining ; and the rather as she pledged herself that she would spend some months with me at Glenfillan, accompanied by the gentle Margaret and her infant daughter.

The gratification of Lord Otterford was lively and sincere when he was apprised of this arrangement. He at once felt, as a man of the world,



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having given Lord Otterford full powers to act for me upon every point according to his own discretion, I at length reached the gloomy termination of my journey. As we drove into the vast and desolate court, I flung myself upon the breast of my companion; and for the first time since our departure from England, gave free loose to my long pent-up emotions; but I soon rallied when he represented to me the inevitable effects of so ill-timed a weakness; and before my meeting with Lady Flora, I had succeeded in suppressing all external demonstrations of the misery that lay heavy at my heart.

I shall not weary the reader by a detail of the loneliness and monotony of my existence at Glenfillan after the departure of my affectionate and anxious travelling-companion. Suffice it that at the close of a month or two of utter despondency, I began to accuse myself of cowardice and egotism in thus wasting life in weak and useless indolence. The thought of Devereux returned upon me, too, brighter and dearer than ever. I must not fail now, for his sake! I looked around me, and each succeeding day discovered how much I was indebted to the consideration of Lord Otterford. My personal servants had been bribed by an increase of salary to bury themselves, at least for a few months, in the country, in order to afford me

their services ; the appliances of convenience and even luxury which had been dedicated to my especial use in town, had preceded me to Scotland : and Lady Flora, the tyrannical jailer who had lent herself unhesitatingly to the projects of Sir James, forewarned in time, was all humility and obsequiousness. The one great ambition of her life was realized ; she was again an in-dweller of her father's castle ; and as she had been made aware that her continuance under that coveted roof depended solely on my pleasure, she bent herself, with admirable ductility, to the new exigencies of her position.

My faithful Susan was a treasure to me amid this natural and moral wilderness. I had requested Lord Otterford, while arranging my pecuniary affairs, to ensure such a provision for life to the faithful girl as might enable her to realise the fond visions of her heart ; but she refused to abandon me during my sojourn at Glenfillan ; and to her I turned for comfort and encouragement in every moment of despondency. She it was who drew my attention to the school founded by my sister, and to the poor whom she had fed ; and I eagerly embraced the prospect of occupation and interest afforded by an emulation of her exertions.

I soon became popular in the neighbourhood,

for I was rich in means, and subdued in spirit ; and where the evil was beyond the reach of gold, I was blessed for my words of sympathy and comfort. My home-hours were the most difficult to support with resignation ; for when I found myself alone in the keen mountain air, or seated in the humble dwellings of my pensioners, my thoughts were not wholly absorbed by self, and for a time I forgot to dwell upon my trials, and learned to trust in a future which was to compensate for all. It was during my periods of enforced companionship with Lady Flora that I felt the whole weight and tedium of my position. No longer able, from weakened sight, to weave the knights and sheperdesses in which she formerly delighted, she had taken refuge in the knitting-needles bequeathed to her by her maternal aunt ; and wholly absorbed in her monotonous and interminable occupation, passed hours beside me without the utterance of a syllable.

Such was the broad outline of my existence until the arrival of my promised guests ; only relieved at long intervals by the brief visits of Lord Otterford, who encouraged me in my faint efforts in well-doing, and chid me gently for the neglect which I had evidently shewn towards my own health. I was in truth sadly changed. The interest which I took in all that passed around



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the coldness and indifference of her replies forbade all hope of any concession on her part.

At length came the spring ; and with the spring the beloved guests whom I had so long awaited. Lady O'Halloran, with her usual far-sighted consideration, had deferred her visit until near the close of my year of mourning. She wished to judge of the effect which this long seclusion had produced upon my character ; and she had also another reason which she did not state, but which I was subsequently enabled to appreciate.

Our meeting was even more sad than we anticipated. Shocked and alarmed at the change which was visible in my whole appearance ; at my attenuated form, the red spot in my cheek, and the bright light in my eye, the warm-hearted old lady could not conceal her uneasiness ; and our first greetings were scarcely over when she drew me apart, and pillowing my pale brow on her shoulder, began to question me as to the cause of my evidently altered health.

“ Be frank with me, Eveleen ” she said ; “ you have some new and pungent sorrow gnawing at your heart, which is independent of the past. What is it, my poor child ? ”

The flood-gates of my grief opened at once. I had hitherto borne my burthen in silence ; not even to Susan had I confided the apprehension

which was sapping my existence; but now I poured forth on the bosom of this inestimable friend all the anguish and humiliation of my spirit.

Lady O'Halloran listened dejectedly, and in silence. "I might have foreseen," she said bitterly, "that you still loved this man; but, Eveleen, you must no longer yield to a weakness which has become unworthy. I have deferred my arrival here until this late period, in order to await with you the close of your period of exile, and to reclaim you as a guest. You have yet much to endure, but you will not disappoint my hopes; you will struggle to be just to yourself; and to avenge your blighted name. I will not abandon you to yourself until you have convinced me that you are worthy of the trust."

I looked up at her in silence; but with beseeching in my eyes.

"Yes—perhaps it will be better so—" she murmured as if unconsciously; "sooner or later the blow must fall, and why not now, when her own fears have partially prepared her for the truth?—You must forget this man, poor sufferer;" she continued, as she folded me in her arms; "there is a gulf between you which can never be overpassed. This is your last trial, and you must receive it in patience and humility."

"He will not obey their bidding;" I gasped

out; "be the difficulties what they may, his affection will overcome them."

"Eveleen, remember how long he has abandoned you to sorrow and to doubt."

"He was forbidden, like myself, to seek a meeting—he hoped for brighter days—he trusted in patience, as I have done, to the future."

"Deceive yourself no longer, my poor child. In the cruel pride of his heart he has forsaken you—to preserve what he sees fit to call his honour, he has left you to the desolation of your own spirit. The passion of which he boasted, could not resist the influence of envenomed tongues; he had not the moral courage requisite to enforce either your justification, or his own—and, in short, Eveleen, you must think of him no more."

I made no effort to interrupt these crushing words. I listened eagerly, breathlessly, as though my life hung upon their import; and yet I did not clearly comprehend their force; and Lady O'Halloran had long ceased to speak, while I still listened, as though I had more to learn, and that all I had already heard were subject of comparative insignificance.

"Speak, Eveleen;" at length exclaimed my companion, terrified at the silence by which her

communication had been succeeded ; “ tell me that you will forget this weak and worthless man.”

“ We forget all in the grave ;” I said as I rose calmly from beside her : “ *All !* even the one hope of a whole existence. And now let me leave you for a time ; I must be alone—to think.”

“ I will accompany you to your room, Eveleen, do not restrain your tears, they will relieve you.”

“ I have no tears to shed ;” I whispered hoarsely, as I tottered from the apartment upon her supporting arm ; “ I have no time for tears ; I must be alone—to think.”

I was conveyed to my chamber, and laid in my bed. A brain-fever supervened. The same physician who witnessed the agonies of Adela, now watched over mine ; the same dreary stillness reigned throughout the house. Lord O’Halloran hastened to remove his wife and child to their more happy home ; but his mother lingered beside what she believed to be my death-couch, in order to fulfil her last pledge to her old friend.

I was not, however, destined to sink under my trial. Life was yet too strong within me ; and after many weeks of danger and delirium, my faculties recovered their balance. To what a dreary waking was I condemned ! Even the wild and fitful

visions of my fever had been less bitter and exhausting than the crushing memories which hovered, like foul spectres of the past, about my restless pillow during my convalescence. How often did I close my languid and stiffened eyelids, and pray to die—to die as Adela had done, and to be at rest. But even as that impious wish rose within me, the low-voiced breath of prayer murmured beside my bed; and the ministering angel who knew the struggle that was going on within me, recalled me to calmer and more holy thoughts.

Slowly and painfully I was restored to health, but I was no longer what I had been. The chastening hand which had been laid heavily upon me in mercy, had sobered down the effervescence of my nature, and made me a new being. Humble, obedient, and submissive, I offered no opposition to the will of those about me; and when my strength was sufficiently restored to admit of the arrangement, I passively suffered myself to be removed from Glenfillan, and conducted by easy stages to the home of my unwearying friend, under her protection and that of Lord Otterford.

I remained for months beneath her hospitable roof; and, could I have blotted out the memory of the past, nothing would have been wanting to

my happiness; but the arrow had been driven home; and I had not strength to wrench it out. I knew that my fair fame was blighted—that my mother had abandoned me—and that the dream of my life was over. Devereux had become a husband. His bride was young, and beautiful, and wealthy as I had been; but upon her the breath of calumny had never rested—his honour was secure from taint! This was indeed a bitter pang, but it was the last. Thenceforward I acquired courage to look steadfastly at my position, and my resolve was taken.

“I will purchase Rooksley from Lady Madeleine;” I said, in reply to an inquiry from my hostess. “She will cede it to me without difficulty, for she has no associations with the place which she can desire to retain. There I shall not be quite desolate; for your society, and that of the good rector, will reconcile me to myself, and teach me to forget the height from which I have fallen. I have no longer anything in common with the happy and the prosperous; but I may still solace the suffering and the needy. You alone will not misjudge me; and I shall require all your support to enable me to endure the long years of life which are spread out before me.”

“Speak not so despondingly, my dear Eveleen;” replied my listener; “time will do much; you are still in the first bloom of womanhood; and may yet have long years of happiness before you, both as a wife and a mother.”

“Never!” I said emphatically: “No man shall take scorn and reproach to his bosom through my means; nor, after my past experience, do I anticipate that, even had I formed a different resolution, an individual could be found so generous to me, and so unjust to himself. No, my kind friend, I have for ever done with vague and dreamy visions. Society has rejected me, and I bow beneath its fiat, however I may question its equity. There is much to do at Rooksley; much misery to alleviate; much ignorance to instruct. May I, in my character of a monitress, learn to practise the lessons which I shall endeavour to enforce.”

Convinced of my sincerity, Lady O'Halloran encouraged me by her approbation; and soon my return to Rooksley was arranged and accomplished; nor was it long ere the voice of gladness and revel was once more heard within its walls; for, shortly after my establishment, Susan was united to the husband of her choice; and the event was productive of no regret to myself, as I retained her bridegroom in my service.

I had judged correctly in believing that my mother would offer no obstacle to my purchase of the property. Aware that it must revert to me at her death, and satisfied that so long as I remained in that retirement, I should not cross her own path, she exerted her energies to expedite the transfer; and in a shorter time than I had dared to hope, I found myself mistress of the coveted domain.

And now, what more have I to add? Who cannot appreciate the tedium, the regrets, and the despair of such a waste of life? Ten, twenty weary years passed over me; and those who looked upon me would have declared me happy but I was not so. Feverishly impatient to create new interests and new ties, I entered upon the duties and privileges of my new position with an uncalculating and reckless profusion both of energy and outlay, which called forth the expostulations of Lady O'Halloran, and excited the astonishment of Dr. James. The paupers in the almshouses built by my mother had increased pensions; and the children in her school were newly clothed; the old church was cleaned and beautified; cottages were levelled and rebuilt; the idle were employed; the sick tended; and the aged placed beyond the reach of want. Many, in the gratitude of their hearts, spoke of me as a saint;

but they could not look beneath the surface. There were times when I was impatient and irritable under my misfortunes : and asked myself why I was thus called upon to suffer, when the errors of so many others were tolerated, without either expiation or reproach. In those hours the tears which I shed beside the bed of pain, or with which I listened to the tale of sorrow, did not flow unreservedly for the sufferer whom I was there to soothe ; they were wept also for myself ; nor did the words of heavenly consolation which I had learned to utter always reach my heart. That rebellious heart was yet an alien to its own peace.

I struggled, however, in my better moments, to attain to a more wholesome and a more fitting frame of mind ; but I had much, indeed, to learn, and still more to unlearn. No one could with impunity pass through the ordeal to which I had been subjected by my ill-regulated passions ; and thus, even when I endeavoured to press forward, I frequently fainted by the way.

In the midst of these conflicting feelings, I was summoned to the sick-bed of my more than mother ; and with a heart torn by fear and misgiving I hastened to her side. How unlike was her period of suffering to that through which I had so lately passed ! There was no

remorse here to strew the pillow with thorns—no disgrace to cast a gloom over the atmosphere—no abandonment to make the sinking spirit shriek out in its desolation. All was calm, peaceful, and full of hope; and the blessing which she breathed, with her dying hand pressed heavily upon my head, rose as a sweet incense to heaven, and hallowed what it offered.

Still I lived on; and I did good; for it is a merciful as well as a marvellous dispensation that the faults of the erring are sometimes made to minister to the happiness of those who suffer; and so it was with me. I imparted the joy which I could no longer feel; I carried with me the consolation of which I myself despaired; and it was not until time had touched me with a gentle, but a certain hand, that I began to consider the past in its true colours.

More than once my faded beauty or my known wealth, would have enabled me to risk a new venture on the stormy waves of that world by which my very existence had been forgotten; but I no longer aspired to its suffrages; nor did I care to peril my present peace for the uncertain tenure of any earthly affection.

The commencement of my narrative will suffice to prove, that I have long been reconciled to my lot. Childless, widowed, and an orphan, I am not, nevertheless, left desolate in my old age. On the death of my mother, which was occasioned by a cold taken on quitting a heated room in a costume ill suited to any violent transition of atmosphere; and which was too sudden to enable me to offer her my last duty as a child, Lord Otterford hastened at my request to pass his period of mourning at Rooksley. He was rapidly becoming an old man; he had ceased to value society; and had few wants save those which are necessary to a well-furnished table; and thus, as we had no vow of abstinence at my hermitage, it will be readily understood that I prevailed upon him without much difficulty, to become my permanent companion. His games at chess with Dr. James are interminable; and I might, perhaps, sometimes find them tedious, were my solitude not enlivened by the frequent presence of Mary O'Halloran, who was in infancy the solace of my sorrow, and who is in her beautiful and blooming girlhood the charm of my old age. My worthy neighbours at the Hall insist that she bears a striking resemblance to what I must once have been; and my father-in-law, whose eyes are

dimmed by time, and whose perceptions are somewhat blunted by his habits of self-indulgence, eagerly ratifies their verdict.—

May she have a better fate ! She is my adopted heiress, and the hope of my waning life.

THE END.

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